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The Story of a Passing World

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The Pulse of Life

A Story of a Passing World

By

Mrs. Belloc Lowndes

Author of "The Heart of Penelope" and "Barbara Rebell"

"Love . . . that very mortal passion which
beats at so many closed doors of the Universe"



London
William Heinemann
1908

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PART I

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CHAPTER I

"Elle était toute petite ma vie ; mais c'était ma vie, c'est-à-dire le centre des choses, le milieu du monde."

FRANCIS DOMVILLE, walking slowly across Kensington Gardens on a hot July afternoon of the year 1903, felt an injured and, above all, a deeply-incensed man.

The rejection of an offer of marriage, even when it brings with it a secret measure of relief, is always a mortifying and discouraging experience—in some ways more unendurable to the man who has set on the business with forethought, and, as he thinks, with commendable prudence, than to your true, instinctive lover.

In the one case, the man naturally marvels at the lady's want of good sense, and judges severely her folly in flinging away so desirable a possession as his heart; but in the other,—humility being the essence of instinctive love,—the lover cannot wonder that the beloved should have scorned so poor and unworthy a creature as he knows himself to be, and with him, or so it generally is, remains something of hope.

Unfortunately for Domville, he was in the first of these two predicaments. Having made up his mind, not without a considerable mental struggle, to marry; having, further, chosen the lady, secure in the knowledge that, whatever his own private opinion might be, most of those who composed his world would regard him as an exceptionally lucky fellow; having brought

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himself to feel for her something very like genuine liking and even respect,—to a man like Domville the two feelings as regarded the woman he meant to make his wife could not be divorced,—it was intolerable that the plan so carefully elaborated should have so hopelessly miscarried.

It was specially intolerable that Rose Hassal—that was the name of the young lady he had intended to honour—should not even have waited till he had made her an offer before rejecting him. Had she done so, he could, or so he flattered himself when thinking over the matter with increasing soreness, have made her feel thoroughly ashamed of herself. But Miss Hassal had been too clever so to put herself in the wrong.

She had carefully considered the proposal, or, to call it by its right name, the bargain, wordlessly set before her, and had decided that it was not worthy of her acceptance. Domville had also considered the whole matter with great care, but he had come to exactly the opposite conclusion; from his point of view, the bargain had been one of the most desirable, as between willing buyer and seller, ever offered in Vanity Fair. That the whole business, regarded from the standpoint which circumstances thrust upon him, had been at times repugnant—for he was not of the human stuff out of which are fashioned heiress-hunters—was now forgotten.

And yet, during the last three days, Francis Domville had thought more of Rose Hassal, she had filled his mind and possessed his imagination far more vividly, than during the whole of the previous course of his lethargic courtship; and this was the stranger inasmuch that the man with whom he lived, his cousin, Paul Feyghine, had now suddenly left off talking of her.

Before Domville had received the awkward, prim little note, with the amazing postscript, which told him

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of her engagement to another man, Feyghine had done little else but talk of, and against, Miss Hassal.

Again and again, using the privilege of close relationship as well as that of friendship, Feyghine had assured his cousin that he was about to make a terrible mistake, and had urged him to draw back while yet there was time. But Domville had paid no heed to this well-meant counsel; indeed, it had been with difficulty that he had sometimes stopped himself from reminding the speaker that of all men in the world he was the least fitted to offer advice on such a subject. It is not to the mariner who has brought his own bark to shipwreck that the prudent seaman goes for his reckoning, even in fair weather; and yet in this matter Feyghine had been wise, and Domville lamentably out of his course.

Francis Domville had always belonged, as regarded his relations with women, to the masterful,—that is, to the winning side. Like most men fond of material adventure, he had been, as a sentimentalist, something of a rover, treating love rather as a distraction than as a serious business, while sometimes, for all that, receiving—though more often, perhaps, inflicting—heart wounds which left scars. The thought that Rose Hassal's rebuff might mean that his day was over,—that love, in the measure he was prepared to welcome the emotion, was no longer his to evoke and when he chose, compel, was an added bitterness. While reading Miss Hassal's letter, he had felt as if age had stealthily crept up and tapped him on the shoulder.

Walking slowly along, his eyes bent on the ground, Domville suddenly recalled the day, only a week ago, when he had entertained not only Rose Hassal and the dull married cousin she used as a chaperon on great occasions, but also a dozen or so of her own set, that

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set which had only become his since he had honoured Miss Hassal with his attentions. A picnic had been the excuse for showing, to the girl he had then believed would be his wife, Gaynesford, the stately and austerely beautiful place which he called home, and for which he cared deeply, even though, through first his father's, and then his own, folly and extravagance, he was now compelled to see it often occupied by strangers, but where, thanks to his marriage, he had hoped henceforth to live for the greater part of his life.

That dream was now over, and to-day he hated to remember how those rowdy people had desecrated his scented, solitary gardens with their presence, and filled the vast hall and the spacious rooms of his noble old house with their noisy laughter. The man to whom Rose Hassal was now engaged had actually been there, and, as Domville now recalled with rage, at her suggestion.

Domville found it some small consolation to be able to tell himself that, even when attracted, almost against his will, by Miss Hassal's strong vitality and audacious sense of fun, he and she had never achieved that intimacy, that communion of thought and sympathy, which he had sometimes enjoyed with other women. At no time had Rose Hassal fulfilled, even in slight measure, Domville's hidden ideal of what his wife should be. He and she had remained, though nominally intimate friends,—and friendships nowadays can be very intimate between a man and a young woman,—always on the threshold of true confidence. More, he had not even divined a side of her nature which he now knew to be there; for in the postscript of the letter in which she had told him of her engagement to another man, Rose Hassal, for the first time, had suddenly opened a little window on her soul. "You never *really* cared. He does—a poor thing, but mine own,"—so had run the

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brief sentences. Domville had thought her incapable of such acuity of spiritual vision.

Francis Domville belonged wholly by birth, but only in a sense by upbringing and association, to that retired section of the English world which, even now, is almost a caste,—that composed of those Roman Catholic families who, perforce compelled to live apart from public affairs during the course of two long centuries, have only lately, and in a sense reluctantly, emerged from their seclusion. The Domvilles of Gaynesford had given martyrs to their faith, and, what had proved of far more material moment to them, had fallen from the once great estate they had held under the Tudors into the quietest of country gentry. Then, during the nineteenth century, two successive owners of Gaynesford had married out of their faith, and, as was the custom of that day, while the sons followed the religion of the father, the daughters had followed that of the mother. The effect in both generations had been unfortunate, more peculiarly so in the case of our Francis Domville, who, without in the least sympathizing with his mother's dry religious tenets, knew her to be an incomparably finer and stronger character than his good-looking, good-natured and extravagant father.

The difference of religion had also vitiated the young man's relation to his only sister, on whom the religious disunion between her father and mother had had a very different, but none the less vital, effect than it had had on her brother.

Anne Domville had inherited from her father's side of the house an intense receptiveness to spiritual influences; and her Protestant mother's teaching, even more her Protestant mother's stern, matter-of-fact conception of religion and the part it should play in the life of every sensible and self-respecting Englishwoman, satisfied none of the girl's inherited craving for a

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warmer and more intimate link with that mysterious unseen world of which the Domvilles of another age had proved themselves such true and loyal citizens.

Had she been born in that other age,—had she, for instance, been the sister of that Francis Domville whose love for a queen had led to his beheading,—Anne would almost certainly have become a nun, eager to assoil, by her prayers and fastings, her ill-fated brother's soul. Such an heroic course being, to her, impossible, Anne Domville, true daughter of a race which had carried to the furthest point the virtue, it might almost be said the art, of self-abnegation, consented without a murmur, though not without a certain hidden revolt, to marriage with a contemporary of her father's, whom her parents, for once united in their view of life, had indicated as a suitable husband. Then, very soon after her marriage, the two in obedience to whose wish she had made the sacrifice of herself died within a few months of one another, leaving Anne Leycester, as she had now become, strangely alone.

Very differently, and most people would have thought far more kindly, had fate treated Mrs. Leycester's only brother.

Francis Domville had begun life as one of those men of whom considerable things are expected, and only of late had he grown conscious that he had disappointed his friends' expectations. To use a good, old-fashioned phrase, he had too early become his own father—too early found himself free to try experiments in the art of living. Such experiments, invariably costly, are sometimes apt to be dangerous to soul and body. Without counting the cost, Domville had done and experienced much of that which he had set out to do and experience, and yet in a sense he now felt that his first real knowledge of life, regarded from the broad human stand-

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point, had come to him within the last few years, for he had been one of the first non-Service men who had volunteered in the dread autumn of 1899. In South Africa he had done well, so well indeed that he had been pressed to make the army henceforth his profession; but what he knew, or thought he knew, of soldiering in peace-time held out no attraction to a nature impatient of restraint.

He had returned to England filled with an instinctive longing for normal pleasures, and even for normal duties. For the first time, also, he felt enamoured of the life of a country gentleman, and his heart had gone out towards Gaynesford. Hence had come this miserable, this mortifying episode with Miss Hassal, whose original, and to most people attractive, personality overshadowed the vulgar prestige conferred upon her by the fact that she was the only child of an immensely rich man.

As so often happens in such a case, Domville's sense of humiliation was rendered immeasurably greater by the knowledge that those about him all knew of his disappointment. Some few of his acquaintances,—men and women who would have been dumb had Miss Hassal formally jilted him,—had thought themselves at liberty to speak to him of the matter, treating it as a thing to be either laughed at or deplored, according to their view of life, and according to their sense, or lack, of delicacy. A wiser man would have gone away; Francis Domville determined to stay and face the matter out.

Meanwhile, and especially to-day, he hardly knew what to do with himself. He hated to be alone with his thoughts, and yet to seek out those with whom he had lately been spending the whole of his time would almost certainly bring him across Rose Hassal, and so far he had been successful in his effort to avoid her.

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On the other hand, he was half ashamed to look up old acquaintances whom he had neglected since his absorption in Miss Hassal's circle.

Then suddenly it occurred to him that he might as well make his way across the Park and call on his aunt, Madame Feyghine, in South Street. There, in what had once been his grandparents' town house, where nothing had been altered since its owner's girlhood, he would be sure of a safe refuge from Miss Hassal, and from Miss Hassal's friends.

In most lives there come moments when blood proves surprisingly thicker than water. One of those moments had now come to Francis Domville. Not for long years, not perhaps since the death of the Russian husband who had admired and loved her so loyally, had Letitia Feyghine been thought of with such a kindly feeling as that which swept over her nephew this Sunday afternoon. But then she, whom those about her regarded as a singularly disagreeable and arrogant old woman, had alone understood the inner meaning of her nephew's disappointment, and sympathized with his feeling of humiliation.

When he had told her of Miss Hassal's engagement, Madame Feyghine had only uttered a very few words,—"Preferred young Barton and his stucco palace to you and Gaynesford? Poor silly little fool!"—and they were words which had found sonorous echo in their hearer's heart. His father's sister had understood, or so Domville believed, that what he felt was not so much the slur on himself, as on the place which, even if now so often occupied by strangers, was yet his possession, even in a sense his *raison d'être* in life, and the thing which should have made him desirable in the eyes of such as Rose Hassal.

Madame Feyghine, in spite of her foreign name, her foreign affectations of manner, and her constant

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criticism of everything connected with her native country, had remained typically English in the warp and woof of her nature. It was to her incredible that a British manufacturer's daughter could seriously prefer a manufacturer's son to such a man as was her own nephew, the reigning, even if impoverished, Domville of Gaynesford. When it became apparent that the incredible had happened, Madame Feyghine regarded the incident as closed, and made up her mind to strike Miss Hassal off her visiting-list,—an easy matter to a hostess who disapproved of the new fringes of society, and who regarded plain speaking, and even downright rudeness, as among the pleasantest privileges conferred by rank and age.

Following the foreign fashion, Madame Feyghine gave a general evening reception once a week, and she was only at home on other days to a small circle of real intimates and relations. This was why Domville felt sure, this Sunday afternoon, of finding himself among friends, for well he knew whom he would see gathered round the samovar in his aunt's old-fashioned drawing-room.

There, most certainly, would he meet his own housemate, his cousin, Paul Feyghine, who, however much he might long to be elsewhere, must surely present himself in South Street every Sunday afternoon if he would escape the unpleasant consequences of his mother's sharp displeasure. There must also be Mary Wratten, who, though nominally an adopted daughter, filled the difficult rôle of unpaid companion to Madame Feyghine. With Miss Wratten, Domville was on terms of considerable, almost brotherly, intimacy. A man or two of the hostess's own age and generation, tolerated, even welcomed, as recalling the days when their friend, now the plainest and least adorned of old women, had been the beautiful Letitia Domville, would doubtless

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complete the little circle. But stay, there also he would almost certainly find his own sister, Madame Feyghine's only niece and favourite kinswoman, Anne Leycester.

Francis Domville was seven years older than his sister, and they had none of those common nursery associations which mean so much in later life. During the few years her married life lasted, Mrs. Leycester had seen but little of her only brother; since her widowhood, however, they had been thrown much together, and during his ill-advised pursuit of Rose Hassal, Anne had shown him a measure of unspoken understanding and sympathy which had surprised and touched him.

As Domville at last turned out of the Park, an involuntary smile lit up his fair, tanned face; such sober joys as his aunt's house held for him had not been his during the last few weeks.

Madame Feyghine had been quite willing, nay eager, to welcome Rose Hassal as a niece, but she had never wanted to see her in any other character. The fierce old woman, born and bred in an England so different from that to which she had returned after long years spent in Russia, had no toleration for the type of modern English girlhood of which Miss Hassal was so finished an example; and yet, as Domville now remembered, and remembering smiled again, the girl who was credited with such extraordinary powers of charming and winning those whom she set herself to charm and win, had been at some pains to propitiate the older woman, for whom she professed a cult which was not welcome to, or even tolerated by, its object.

Why, the very last time he and Rose Hassal had been there together, he had been indignant at the cold and distant civility of his aunt's manner to the girl he

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was then proud of calling his friend. But, after all, why should he think of all this now? Everything was over, and perhaps well over.

A moment later, Domville was passing through into the dark hall of his aunt's old-fashioned house. The front door had been opened by Gregor, Madame Feyghine's Russian man-servant, and Domville was touched by the old fellow's sudden grin of welcome; and then, as he went up the staircase, preceded by Gregor, it struck Domville that the Russian looked unusually smart. In place of the seedy black coat and knee-breeches which was the old man's usual costume, Gregor wore his tcherkess uniform—that is, a long, red caftan, gathered in at the waist with a black and silver belt, studded with knives and hunting implements; across his broad breast ran a band of medals.

Gregor was a privileged being in this rather curious household. He had been with his late master, Nicholas Feyghine, all through the Russo-Turkish War of 1877; he had received his dying orders and messages; and later he had been dry nurse and faithful slave of the fatherless son of his dead master and comrade in arms.

Long years in London had by now taught the old man-servant something of the English language, but he had remained as typically Russian as if he had never left Moscow or St. Petersburg. He regarded the country in which he was doomed to spend his old age with a mixture of contempt, aversion, and fear; and yet the thought of leaving his English mistress and going back to Russia never suggested itself to him, and he was on the happiest terms of affectionate familiarity with Madame Feyghine's circle of relations and London friends, while for her son Paul he would willingly any day have laid down his life.

As he preceded Domville up the staircase, the old

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servant once or twice murmured, "I make mistake before, but now I make no mistake," and, still muttering something of the kind, he flung open the door of the drawing-room.

As it opened, the man on the threshold made a scarcely perceptible pause, instinctively drawing back as he did so into the shadow of the dark landing. Quickly, while yet taking in every detail of the scene before them, Domville's eyes travelled over the group of people gathered about the tall, spare figure of his aunt, Madame Feyghine.

First they rested for a moment on the massive frame and huge shoulders of Paul Feyghine. The son of the house was standing by his mother, his appearance instinct with a certain slumbrous strength, while his ugly, intelligent face was rendered arresting by the bright blue eyes, which formed an ever-changing index to his mind and heart.

Then the onlooker became aware of the quiet presence of Mary Wratten. The girl was seated by the tea-table, half hidden by the large bubbling samovar in front of her, and by the array of little dishes containing various cakes, and the preserved Siberian raspberries without which no Russian tea-table is complete.

Next, Domville's eyes, still travelling on, sought the half-moon bow-window, against which was outlined the black-robed, still youthful figure of his own sister.

Mrs. Leycester's pale, finely-modelled, oval face was framed in a close Quaker-like bonnet, for she was one of those rare human beings who pay no heed to the vagaries of fashion, and this perhaps was one of the reasons why those about her set her apart in their minds and believed her to be far more singular, far more exempt from the usual passions and failings which afflict humanity, than she really was. By the side of Anne Leycester stood—to Francis Domville a most

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unexpected and most unwelcome apparition — Rose Hassal's fiancé, the good-tempered and debonair, if commonplace, Jack Barton.

But all these people, clearly as Domville saw them, keenly as he became aware of their presence in that quick, searching moment, served but as a background to the girl whom he had successfully avoided meeting during the last few days.

Half kneeling on a low stool, and looking up fearlessly into the face of her grim hostess, shone Rose Hassal; for her brilliant little figure, clad in rose-red, formed a spot of light on which the late afternoon sun seemed to concentrate in limelight fashion. With that sure instinct certain women have for holding the stage, even if they be cast for a minor part, Miss Hassal at that moment impressed Francis Domville as the one living, the one significant, human being in the large room.

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CHAPTER II

". . . just oblige me and touch
With your scourge that minx Chloe, but don't hurt her much !"

HAD it been possible, Francis Domville would have turned and fled. The sight of the girl in the house where he had so little expected to find her, and from which a certain niceness of feeling should have kept her, filled him with sudden anger. But Gregor had already announced his name in loud guttural tones, and so he went forward, bearing himself on the whole with better grace than did any one of those whom he found ready and rather awkwardly eager to put him at his ease.

Even before they became aware of the new-comer's presence, the men and women gathered together in Madame Feyghine's drawing-room appeared an ill-assorted, unconnected group; and yet, as Domville advanced into the room, Jack Barton, alone among those present, showed manifest discomfiture. For weeks past, the young man had regarded Francis Domville as a much-to-be-feared and hated rival, and even now, although he himself had carried off the prize, there was no sign of triumph on the happy lover's flushed face, as, longing for the signal of departure, he looked anxiously at his fiancée.

But Miss Hassal, whatever her faults, whatever her lack of taste, was not wanting in moral courage. She forced herself to seem unaware of the atmosphere of

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cold disapproval with which she was surrounded, and, after nodding in an easy, friendly fashion to the man whom those present considered she had treated so ill, she went on speaking eagerly in the loud, unmusical voice which yet had something about it forceful and arresting; and, as she spoke, she looked up boldly into the face of Madame Feyghine.

The conversation had turned on the vulgarity of the age, a favourite topic with Madame Feyghine; but the old woman had unwittingly delivered herself into Rose Hassal's hands by singling out for special approval the owners of the most splendid and historically interesting of London's minor palaces, who, alone among their kind, or so she observed, seemed unaware of this present pushful generation.

"Hague House?" repeated Miss Hassal, a trifle maliciously. "It's rather strange that you should mention Hague House! For it is there, Madame Feyghine, that the great War Orphans' Entertainment is to be held next week, and as, up to now, the grounds have never been seen by the public, they are expecting a tremendous rush for tickets. However, as each ticket is to cost five pounds, the crowd isn't likely to be too overwhelming."

"Five pounds apiece? How monstrous! How absurd!" Madame Feyghine turned round abruptly, and fixed her eyes with ironic displeasure on her niece, Mrs. Leycester. "Is that the affair to which you wish to take Mary?"

To the speaker it was so strange that Anne, who, since her widowhood, had given up all the more frivolous side of social life, should break her rule on such an occasion as this. Was it possible that she was about to do so simply in order to give Mary Wratten pleasure? That would indeed be a ridiculous and uncalled-for piece of altruism!

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Mary Wratten was accustomed to hear herself freely discussed in her own presence, but this time the allusion to herself made her flush deeply.

But before Mrs. Leycester could answer her aunt's question, Paul Feyghine hastily interposed: "Anne and Mary are going with me, mamma. The promoters of the fête are running short, it seems, of men, and both Francis and I have been beguiled into promising to take part in a costume dance." Feyghine spoke English perfectly, and yet none of those with whom he came in contact ever made the mistake of taking him for an Englishman.

Rose Hassal turned to him eagerly. "I thought you hated all that sort of thing?" she cried. "But if you are really going, do tell me more about it, Mr. Feyghine! What are you going to wear? You know it's to be a patch-and-powder ball? And you?——" she turned to Domville, and her voice slightly altered; it was the first time she had spoken to him since their exchange of letters.

Again Feyghine interposed: "I doubt," he said good-humouredly, "if the names of the characters we are to personate will convey much to you; the romantic side of history is not often found in the modern young lady's history-book——"

Madame Feyghine was looking sharply from one to the other, and now she interrupted her son with scant ceremony. "You and Francis will naturally wear the costumes you had made for that fête at the Trianon. By the way, I hope you kept them? It would be a great extravagance to get anything else if you still have them. You both looked very well that night, and I don't think you have either of you"—she stopped, and stared critically at the two men—at her son and at her nephew—and then came out with the one word,—"thickened!"

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"Oh!" cried Rose, "then you are going as Frenchmen?"

"Of course not! What an absurd idea!" Madame Feyghine frowned at the girl with whose presence she could so well have dispensed this afternoon; then she added, rather stiffly, "My son's costume was that of the Russian Emperor who visited the Court of Louis XVI., and who adopted as his incognito the name of Le Comte du Nord. My nephew personated——" The old lady paused for a moment; she looked at Mary Wratten, whose business it was to make good her lapses of memory. "What was the fellow's name? I mean Marie Antoinette's platonic lover? Oh yes, Count Axel Fersen, of course!"

"And what do you yourself mean to wear, Miss Hassal?" Feyghine smiled down at her good-naturedly as he asked the question. He felt a stir of pity for the girl; she was evidently ill at ease, and to-day she lacked the sparkle and dash which those who knew her always associated with her presence.

"I am going as 'Pamela,'—I suppose all you learned people know who she was?—and Jack as 'Joseph Andrews.' The costumes are really rather funny. It was old Mr. Gumberg's idea, and he's lent us two such queer old prints——"

"Ha! ha! ha!" Madame Feyghine laughed suddenly and loudly. She was not often really amused, but this happy notion of Mr. Julius Gumberg—an aged worldling who had been old as long as even she could remember—struck her as excessively droll.

Miss Hassal looked rather nervously round the little circle. What a rude, odd manner Madame Feyghine could assume when she chose! The old lady went on sardonically smiling, while those about her remained grave and silent.

There was a long pause. Francis Domville felt a

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sudden sense of irritation sweep over him. After all, why should these good people send Rose Hassal to Coventry for his sake? She had not behaved very well, she had not perhaps played quite fair,—but then, no hearts had been broken! He had known women do far worse things,—damnable things,—and to men who really loved them. Suddenly he remembered the little sentence in Rose's postscript: "You never *really* cared."

Well, that was true. Seeing her here had, in a sense, broken the ugly spell which had been brooding over him. During the last few moments, he had felt how remote they were from one another, and that in spite of their late pretence at intimate friendship. Paul Feyghine had been right; marriage with Rose Hassal would have been a great, a lamentable mistake, and life at Gaynesford dearly purchased at such a price.

So, animated by secret, conflicting feelings, he moved forward, and, looking smilingly down at the now shame-faced little sinner, "You got my note?" he asked; and then observed with amusement that she had the grace to blush, and that violently.

"Yes, yes—it was dear of you!" She added, in a low voice: "I say, ought we to go now? I mean, Jack and I? I'm sure your aunt is expecting some one——"

"Nonsense! Don't think of going yet! Why, I've only just come! I'm sure no one is expected."

"Ton pauvre cousin est bien bête!" Madame Feyghine had turned to her son, scarcely lowering the voice, at once harsh and melodious, peculiar to all those of Domville of Gaynesford blood. Paul Feyghine grimaced with annoyance, but a glance at Miss Hassal's face proved that, if she had heard the words, she had not grasped the meaning of the quickly uttered French sentence.

There was a general movement throughout the room. Paul strode forward, and began talking quickly and

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amicably to his mother's unbidden guest. Mrs. Leycester compelled her aunt's attention, and Domville, walking across to the tea-table, threw himself down beside Mary Wratten. The girl drew her skirts to one side with an intimate, welcoming gesture; she and Francis Domville were very good friends, friends in a sense he and Rose Hassal had never been.

"I can manage my enemies," he muttered, leaning forward, "but Heaven save me from my friends! I could certainly have spared Aunt Letty's taking up the cudgels."

Miss Wratten did not pretend to misunderstand him. She shook her head, and a half-smile lit up her plain, irregularly modelled face. "Gregor ought not to have admitted anyone this afternoon," she whispered back, "for Madame Feyghine is expecting the Grand Duke Paul. He is, it seems, in London, and he has sent her a mysterious message saying that he wishes to see her alone. We made ready for him yesterday, but something prevented his coming, and so it is probable that he will come to-day."

The Grand Duke Paul? Paul Feyghine's godfather and friend at court!—that is, at the Russian Court, the only court which existed for either mother or son. This, then, explained old Gregor's rather fantastic costume, Paul's look of resigned boredom, Madame Feyghine's abrupt, abstracted manner. Domville nearly laughed aloud. What a fool he had been to imagine that his aunt's discourtesy to Rose Hassal, and her obvious desire to get rid of her visitors, were brought about by any regard for his feelings, past or present!

His companion divined something of what was in his mind: "But perhaps the Grand Duke will not come now, after all, for it is getting late. Please don't go yet." Then she stopped speaking abruptly, for Madame

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Feyghine's voice was rising, dominating the murmured conversations going on round her.

"Love"—she spoke with sharp, stinging emphasis—"Love was not a subject which we used to discuss when I was a young woman. It was not that we were ignorant of the meaning of the word,"—the speaker had caught a half-smile on Miss Hassal's face,—"no, indeed. I sometimes have reason to think that the modern young lady is more simple than her mother or grandmother could claim to be. I myself was very young when I became aware that love was often only another name for a very ugly sentiment."

Madame Feyghine looked sharply round the room, and finally allowed her glance to rest full on her son Paul: "I have no patience with the word, or with the feeling it purports nowadays to describe. Even in its best sense, love is the highest form of egotism, while, in its lower and I may add its more usual form, this love of yours makes a man forget his country, neglect his duties, and, if all I hear be true, submit to untold ignominies."

Paul Feyghine made a slight movement, and, to one of those present,—that is, to his cousin, Anne Leycester,—he seemed to have suddenly become that formidable thing, a proud and sensitive man possessed and shaken with hidden anger; swiftly and silently Mrs. Leycester moved over to where he and Rose Hassal were standing, and, scarcely aware of what she was doing, she put out her hand and laid it for a moment on his arm.

Madame Feyghine went on speaking, but, though her eyes still rested on her son, her next words were addressed, as those present were uncomfortably aware, to her niece, Mrs. Leycester: "Another modern form of love is a silly sentimentality, that which makes people wear themselves out in trying to help those whom they fancy are less fortunate than themselves. These

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people also neglect their natural duties, and they get no thanks,—no thanks whatever,—from those on whom they waste their time and their fortune; on the other hand, they can always count on obtaining the admiration of fools. Now, in Russia, where life, as I always maintain, is well organized, love——'

"Yevo Vysotchestvo Pavel Sergievitch!"

Old Gregor's voice trembled with excitement. He was bowing to the ground, and tears glistened in his dim eyes; it grieved him to think that there were only two people present, his mistress and her son, who could properly appreciate the magnificence and urbanity of the august visitor whom he was ushering into Madame Feyghine's presence. Gregor's heart beat with pride when he considered how superior was this Russian Grand Duke—clothed, as such folk should ever be, in a gorgeous uniform—to the English royal personages whom Gregor was sometimes privileged to see driving in the Park, and whose one object seemed to be to look and to dress like common mortals! Then, again, his Highness had shown himself, when in the hall downstairs, at once so god-like and so human. He had dismissed his aide-de-camp, a sure sign of the intimacy of his relations with the Feyghine household, and he had actually remembered Gregor!—remembered the glorious days of 1877, spoken to the old soldier, and with such feeling too, of the ever-lamented Nicholas Andreivitch!

Madame Feyghine, with measured steps, came forward, and two of those present, Francis Domville and Miss Wratten, noted with amusement her sudden transformation from the hectoring English hostess into a suave, cosmopolitan woman of the world. Quickly and discreetly she made the necessary presentations, and to each of those presented to him the Grand Duke

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uttered a pleasant and appropriate word; he spoke alternately in English and in French, and Madame Feyghine adapted herself swiftly to the mood betokened by the use of either tongue.

Even Jack Barton received an elaborate compliment. "Comment, monsieur est le fils du grand maître de forges? Oh yes, I went over the gun foundry—is not that the term?—only last week. Indeed, I have been 'doing business'—is not that the phrase?—with your respected father. My compliments, young sir,—it is not your father's fault that your great nation was so long in achieving victory in South Africa!" Then, perhaps interpreting on Domville's face a look which resented the rather malicious allusion,—"Ah! And this, surely, is the cousin, my dear Paul, who achieved such prodigies of valour in that same campaign?"

The august guest even found a kind and a feeling word for Mary Wratten: "La fille du feu attaché d'Ambassade? Nou da! Pauvre cher! quel excellent homme c'était!"

But not till he had signed to them all to sit down, and not till his small bright eyes were resting approvingly on Miss Hassal, did the Grand Duke's muffled voice become gay and even confidential; his Highness had not thought to meet in his old friend's house so deliciously pretty a little miss. He wondered why Madame Feyghine had forgotten to present her, and it was apparently to Miss Hassal that he addressed his next words:—

"I fear I interrupted a most interesting conversation! Surely I heard uttered the word 'love'? You English are supposed to be so cold, and yet no language has more pseudonyms for what is so charmingly styled here 'the tender passion'! May I be so indiscreet as to inquire the turn of the late discussion?"

The colour suddenly deepened in Rose Hassal's

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cheeks. She was exhilarated by the Grand Duke's obvious approval of her original type of beauty—beauty which owed so much to her own alert intelligence; and so, alone perhaps of those present, she now felt thoroughly at her ease. The last few moments amply compensated for Madame Feyghine's rude, odd manner; this agreeable Imperial Highness might prove a useful acquaintance when she and Jack Barton went to Russia, as they meant to do next year.

So she smiled radiantly at the Grand Duke, thinking how exactly his appearance recalled one of the huge stuffed figures, standing round the young Tsar's slight form, in Madame Tussaud's waxworks. The resemblance was really startling, and extended even to the fixed red colour in the smooth full cheeks, to the bald domed head, framed in curling grey hair, to the dyed moustache, with its twisted waxed ends, and bright, bead-like eyes, now looking at her with so indulgent a stare.

There was a pause, and then Rose raised her voice boldly in answer to the lightly uttered question. "We were listening, sir, to Madame Feyghine. She does not believe that anything good, not even the tender passion, can exist out of Russia! Indeed, I suppose she would agree with the American lady's definition of love——"

"—And what," inquired the Grand Duke, smiling broadly, "was the American lady's definition of love?"

"Love?"—Rose's fresh young voice rang out; she audaciously ventured on the slightest soupçon of a twang,—"Why, no woman can have any idea of the meaning of the word who has not been chased through a Russian palace by a Russian prince disguised as a Russian bear!"

"Ha, ha! Excellent! Excellent! What a delightful tale, and how charmingly recounted! Pray tell me——"

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But the Grand Duke's curiosity was not destined to be ever gratified, for Miss Hassal's moment of triumph was very brief. Madame Feyghine, with a violent, imperious gesture, suddenly motioned her son to ring the bell, and when old Gregor appeared, she said harshly: "Miss Hassal's carriage. At once!"

Now, the young lady and her lover had come on foot. Gregor hesitated; he knew, only too well, the signs which denoted anger in his mistress. "Soudārina," he began submissively.

"Fool!" she spoke in Russian. "If there is no carriage, procure a two-wheeled cab."

Only her son and the Grand Duke understood what she said, but for the second time that afternoon Rose Hassal flushed deeply. Then, very deliberately, the girl turned her back on Madame Feyghine, and, ignoring the others present, made the most graceful of deep curtseys to her hostess's illustrious guest.

A moment later she was gone, gathering, as she went, her swelling pink skirts about her, as if fearing contamination from the floor, the walls, of Madame Feyghine's house.

"Boje-moi! Quelle charmante petite femme! Oh! ces Anglaises—de vraies omelettes en surprise, hein?" and the Grand Duke looked meditatively at the door, through which Miss Hassal and her fiancé, followed by Paul Feyghine and Francis Domville, had just disappeared. He smiled and sighed. Royal personages so rarely meet with the good fortune of an unrehearsed scene,—still more rarely with that of witnessing an unrehearsed effect.

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CHAPTER III

Qui peut sonder le cœur d'une mère?

A MOMENT later his Highness was again face to face with that boredom which to him and his like is synonymous with duty. Mary Wratten and Mrs. Leycester had also slipped noiselessly from the room, and so the Grand Duke found himself at last alone with the widow of the man who had been the most intimate and best-loved friend of his early youth,—a woman, too, whom he had always respected, and never loved or even made love to, in the days when they had both been young, and Letty Feyghine among the half-dozen prettiest women in Petersburg.

The Grand Duke looked meditatively at Madame Feyghine, and moved heavily, uneasily in his chair; for his conscience admonished him that in his character of Paul Feyghine's godfather it was incumbent on him to convey a warning, if not an actual rebuke, to the old Englishwoman, and the knowledge that this task lay before him was painful to a man of his urbane and pleasure-loving disposition.

Your royal personage, though fated to be the most cosmopolitan of modern human beings, cannot but be affected by environment, and so Russian procrastination came to the aid of Paul Sergevitch. The Grand Duke reminded himself that the disagreeable thing he had come to say need not yet be uttered, and that a

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few moments might first be spent in pleasant converse. Nay, more,—why should he not gratify Madame Feyghine by honouring her with confidences concerning a delicate matter now very near his heart? Why not even give her the added pleasure of asking, or of pretending to ask, her advice?

The Grand Duke Paul had already reached that age which ever brings with it a steady thinning of the ranks. His present hostess was one of the few women who could share with him, if only in slight measure, the happy, tender memories of youth, and so——

Madame Feyghine's guest suddenly bent forward, and respectfully kissed her withered hand. "Dear and excellent friend," he murmured, "what pleasure it gives me to see you again! And that although the affair which has brought me to England is—what do you call it?—a frightful bore!" The speaker prided himself, as Russians are so apt to do, on his intimate, colloquial knowledge of both French and English.

The world of Courts seems to exercise on all those who are brought into contact with it a strange and compelling attraction, outlasting personal ambitions and causing those under its sway to forget that other worlds exist. This peculiar state of feeling is compatible with absolute disinterestedness, and has little if any relation to what the world describes as snobbishness. Madame Feyghine leant forward, deeply, unaffectedly interested.

"You remember, dear friend, my poor sister, our gentle beloved Minna?"

"Yes," said Madame Feyghine; "I had of course the privilege of knowing her Highness very well, and I was present at the Grand Duchess's marriage with the Archduke Renier."

"Well, I am here in connection with her daughter's affairs. Strange that so sweet and submissive a char-

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acter as my sister, united to the worthy Renier, should have produced as only child so headstrong and unreasonable a being as my niece Sabine!"

"The Margravine of Moravia?"

"Hélas, oui! You know—for every one knows—the broad outlines of the story. It was an experiment to place a young girl in possession of a new State—an experiment never tried before. But her parents had lived their short, happy life in Moravia, they were affectionately remembered there, and their daughter was hailed as ruler with enthusiasm. For six years everything went well. Moravia is, perhaps, something of a royaume d'opéra comique, un 'Grand Duché de Gerolstein;' but then that, in a sense, was all to the good, and Sabine played at being the independent woman sovereign with great success," — the speaker paused.

"Queens generally hold their own," observed Madame Feyghine, drily. "The great Catherine——"

"Ah! And your own Queen Elizabeth. Boje-moi! What a woman! But to return to my niece; some one,—to be precise, Grabovitz, who has always posed as the Bismarck of the Near East,—took it into his head that the time had come when the Margravine must marry—found a dynasty! For a while she was unwilling; Sabine had dreamed, you understand, of being a Queen Elizabeth,—not a Catherine; no, no, that would not do nowadays! Then, suddenly, the poor child altered her mind, and, while consenting in principle to a state alliance, she developed the most romantic notions—there proving herself to the full our lamented Minna's daughter! But alas! it was not her good fortune to meet with such a man as was her father, our worthy Renier. She is wilful, very wilful. She stipulated for a Pretender! In vain we pointed out to her that 'les rois en exil' are too often de très

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mauvais sujets. She was quite persuaded that it would be delightful to play the rôle of consoling angel. So, instead of going to one of those countries which are perfect pépinières—what is your word? ah yes, nursery gardens—of prince-consorts, we were compelled to seek in Paris. Well, as might have been foreseen, elle a eu la chance de très mal tombée. You heard what took place?" and the Grand Duke looked at Madame Feyghine expectantly.

"In common with every one else," she observed, rather stiffly, "I am, of course, aware that, immediately after the marriage had taken place, the Margravine refused to receive the bridegroom, her consort, and had him conducted to the frontier. Further, that no reason has ever been given," she smiled grimly "for her Royal Highness's peculiar action. Perhaps her feelings had not been sufficiently consulted?"

"Boje-moi! But that was the whole trouble. She chose Don Diego herself! 'Elle l'a remarquée, distinguée——'" the Grand Duke pulled himself up, rather ashamed; he looked with a certain apprehension at Madame Feyghine, but the old English lady had evidently missed the point of his irreverent quotation from the most famous of comic operas.

"But if that was really so—then why——?" Madame Feyghine had no desire to appear indiscreet, and yet it was so pleasant to receive these august confidences—to be perhaps offered the true solution of what had proved to the inner, as well as to the outer, circles of those interested in such affairs, a most interesting human riddle—the spectacle of a bride, and a royal bride, thrusting her bridegroom from her on their wedding day, aye, and even compelling him, so said rumour, to leave the country of which he had just become a naturalized subject, at an hour's notice!

"Enfin! C'est assez delicat à dire, mais—well,

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there was, as you say in England, 'a lady in the case.' The least Don Diego should have done would have been to have left his fair friend at the frontier, but no, he brought her with him, and remained with her—it is clearly proved—up to within a few moments of the marriage ceremony."

"How horrible! What a brute!" The woman in Madame Feyghine suddenly blotted out the courtier.

"Nou da! Your sympathizing heart goes out, dear friend, to the motherless bride. Poor, proud Sabine!" the Grand Duke spoke at last with real feeling in his voice. "Your woman's instinct suggests the word—the fellow was brutal. Had Renier offered such an insult to our Minna, we—the brothers, I mean—would have torn him to pieces! Still, it is a pity my niece became cognisant of the insult so soon after its committal."

"Then the Margravine was told of this—this abominable insult—immediately after her marriage?"

"Well, no—she was unfortunately told before the ceremony, two hours before it, in fact." The speaker hesitated—he seemed about to add something, then changed his mind, and went on: "Yes, and by one who should have known better, by a woman in whom we all reposed such confidence,—in a word, by her chief lady-in-waiting, the Baroness Karff, who is what you call here 'a damned busybody!'"

A very curious look came over Madame Feyghine's face. "But I thought," she observed, "that the Baroness Karff was such a very remarkable woman."

"Ach! Yes, so she is,—too clever! She had never desired this marriage; she wished Sabine to remain unmarried, so she told her of Don Diego's légèreté. I was not there myself, but the scene, it appears, was very strange, very terrible. As our devoted English nursie used to say when we were children, 'the fat was in the fire,'—and it is still there."

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"And yet the Margravine went through the marriage ceremony?"

"Yes, she did that, thanks to Grabovitz. But he made a mistake, a great mistake, as matters have turned out, in virtually forcing her to do so."

"The marriage will, of course, be anulled?" Madame Feyghine's remark was put in the form of a question.

"Without doubt, if nothing better can be devised. But would it not be preferable for Sabine to make of a bad bargain the best? Especially as the real truth is known to so few? Unhappily, my niece will not hear reason. The poor young creature is not yet"—he sought and found a slang phrase which admirably expressed his meaning—"dans son assiette! For a while she went on, or tried to go on, exactly as she had done before there was any question of marriage; then suddenly her nerves gave way; she has become ill, completely sleepless. Even Grabovitz is seriously alarmed about her, and so we have persuaded her to come to England, on a strictly private visit, of course, and I have come after her to act as mediator. In passing through Paris I saw the naughty bridegroom. He is very short of money, and very repentant. Je l'ai bien sermonné, and I come armed with the humblest apologies, but so far Sabine remains obdurate. However, even this inopportune matter has enabled me to enjoy the pleasure of seeing you, and of renewing acquaintance with my godson."

The Grand Duke stopped speaking abruptly. He knew that the moment he dreaded had at last come, and that he could no longer put off administering the rebuke, and conveying the warning, it was his duty to administer and to convey. So it was in an altered and in a very cold voice that he observed: "It is a long time, a very long time, since we have seen Paul Nicholaievitch in Petersburg."

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Madame Feyghine gathered herself sharply together. The interesting confidences, of which she was proud to have been the recipient, were forgotten, wiped out, in the quick awakening of her maternal instinct. "My son," she answered quietly, "is passionately devoted to his native country; he regrets even more than I do his long exile"—her voice trembled—"from what is to both of us home. But we have important interests in England."

The Grand Duke moved uneasily in his chair. "Nou da! Don't suppose for a moment, dear and esteemed lady, that I was venturing on a word of criticism, but I think it well to inform you that not long ago the Emperor, showing me a map of our country's great landed proprietors, spoke of Paul Nicholaievitch Feyghine, and asked why he was never in Petersburg, and why he so seldom sojourned on his estates."

Again there was a pause, but Madame Feyghine remained silent; and the Grand Duke went on.

"I, of course, explained to my august nephew—himself so excellent a son—that your Paul was compelled to remain in England owing to your state of health; but again, some days later, His Majesty inquired when my godson would be in Petersburg. Nay, more, he graciously expressed a wish to see him as soon as he arrived. When I was a little child," continued the Grand Duke with seeming irrelevance, "I remember the great-aunt Catherine reading aloud to her needlework parties the stories of a delightful English writer, a certain Miss Edgeworth. One of those stories has always lingered in my mind, it was called 'The Absentees'; now, our Emperor, dear friend, does not like absentees."

"Your Highness"—Madame Feyghine instinctively adopted the foreign mode of address—"knows why my son left his country;" the mother spoke slowly, and

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then she quoted, in Russian, an old peasant proverb to the effect that the shell of an egg, once broken, cannot short of a miracle again be made whole. "Besides, he has returned, more than once, to Russia."

"Certainly he was there, and I heard of his sojourn, but I did not have the pleasure of seeing him. Owing to these rumours of a little trouble with Japan, many brave men are returning to Petersburg. Why should not Paul make that the excuse of coming back? His old regiment will delight to welcome him."

The Grand Duke leant forward, and looked into Madame Feyghine's troubled face; that face—now as plain as he had once known it lovely—seemed to have suddenly grown years older. He half rose from his chair, surprised and distressed at the effect of his words. "Enfin, chère amie, n'en parlons plus! Je me suis permis de vous dire un mot, mais vous m'avez tout à fait rassuré! Arrangez-vous afin que notre bon Paul vienne passer deux ou trois mois à Petersbourg cet hiver. Ah! I see! You fear the war. But reassure your maternal heart; *there will be no war.* Still, it would produce a good impression if Paul put his sword once more at his country's service."

Madame Feyghine clasped her hands tightly together. She had scarcely heard the Grand Duke's last words; for, as he spoke, she was thinking, with almost agonized intensity, over what she had better do.

Now her mind was suddenly made up. In whom could she more properly confide, if not in this powerful friend to whom her dead husband had been almost a foster-brother?

"Paul se perd," she whispered at length, and then again: "Mon pauvre enfant se perd pour une—une de ces créatures!"

"Heu! heu!" The Grand Duke sank back into his chair. He was touched by the mother's evident

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anguish, and amused at what he supposed to be Madame Feyghine's English prudery.

"Ainsi—he has got into a scr—r—ape? Mais, chère amie, il faut que jeunesse se passe! Est-ce une femme du monde? Vous en avez de si jolies, de si ravissantes, à Londres!"

"Your Highness does not understand," and she suddenly regretted the confidence which it had cost her no small effort to make. "This is not a 'scrape,' or a mere vulgar intrigue; were it so, I should not have permitted myself to mention such a matter to your Highness," she spoke slowly, choosing her words with difficulty.

The Grand Duke allowed himself to interrupt: "Seriously, if that is the only reason which keeps Paul in England,"—the mother bent her head slightly —"then I feel, I confess, much relieved. I had feared something so different, something so serious—so-called Liberal opinions, for instance. But if it is only 'a lady in the case,' then, dear and respectable friend, pray calm yourself! Remember, the fiercer the burning the more rapid the extinction. You are a saintly woman, and I a mere sinful man,"—the Grand Duke smiled a jovial smile,—"but our knowledge of the world compels us both, (I am sure you will agree with me), to recognize the transiency of the feeling which you tell me possesses our dear Paul!"

"Does your Highness remember Fedor Volkonsky?" Madame Feyghine was looking down at her thin hands; she did not wish to meet the change which she knew would come over the smiling face of the man sitting opposite her.

Fedor Volkonsky had been the hero of a love-tragedy which had shaken the Russian society of the 'sixties to its pleasure-loving foundations; and the Grand Duke Paul had special reason to remember the

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affair, for only by a mere accident had he escaped being present at the scene which had transformed into a shambles the boudoir of the prettiest and most popular of those French actresses who make St. Petersburg more or less their abiding-place.

"Volkonsky was a madman," observed the Grand Duke coldly, rising, as he spoke, from his chair. "Jealousy, carried to such an extreme, is madness. Surely you would not compare your son to Fedor Volkonsky?"

"God forbid!"—Again Madame Feyghine regretted the impulse which had led her to confide the secret which had of late embittered her life, as well as estranged her from her only child.

"Who is the woman in question?" the Grand Duke asked in a serious, authoritative tone, "and how long has the affair been in progress?"

"The woman is Joaquina Nuñez, the dancer—your Highness must have heard of her," Madame Feyghine spoke very slowly and reluctantly. "Paul met her six years ago,—at least so I believe, but my sources of actual information are necessarily meagre." A little colour came into her sallow face, and she added, almost in a whisper, "I have never spoken to Paul on the matter; I could not bring myself to do it."

They were both now standing, the Grand Duke leaning forward rather heavily on his thick, high walking-stick. "Pauvre amie," he said feelingly, "votre cœur de mère s'agite"—he was really moved by the mother's look of angry pain; he even forgave her the very indiscreet allusion to the Volkonsky affair.

"That is the true reason," repeated Madame Feyghine, "why my son never now goes to Russia. He will not leave this—this person, of whom, at least so I am told,"—again she reddened faintly,—"he has often reason to be jealous."

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Another and a final confidence trembled on her lips, but she refrained from making it; instead, she sped her august guest with a kindly question concerning a young man in whom the Grand Duke Paul was known to take an exceptional, indeed almost a paternal, interest.

The inquiry evidently gratified him. "How amiable of you, dear friend, to recall the poor boy! Yes, he is quite well, and, so far, as wise as his friends can expect him to be at his age—he is still young, you know; he dates only from '77. I will send him to-morrow to pay you his respects in person; perhaps you were not aware that he has become my aide-de-camp? He is with me here, in England; in fact I go to find him now, for I have been asked to dine at a tea garden entitled Ranelagh. So adieu, or rather au revoir,"—and with considerable ceremony the huge old man bent over and kissed his hostess's thin fingers.

When the Grand Duke joined the young officer who had been walking up and down South Street for what had seemed to him an eternity,—for it was very warm, and not a time of day when the youth and beauty of Mayfair takes its walks abroad,—his Highness put his large hand on the young man's shoulder, and asked him a series of sudden abrupt questions: "How is your good mother?—Have you written to her since we arrived?—Does she know that you are safe and well?"

The aide-de-camp was greatly taken aback. Since the death of her husband, who had been a high Court official much older than herself, his mother had lived a life of the utmost retirement on their estates near Moscow, and this was the first time that the Grand Duke had ever spoken directly of her to her son. The young man looked embarrassed, and made some kind of stammering reply.

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"Never neglect your mother," said his Highness soberly. "I have always been myself but a poor sinner, but as a son I was above reproach. When I had the happiness to possess a mother, I wrote to her every day. And do you know," he added, speaking more to himself than to his young friend, "do you know what was our beloved mamma's favourite saying? It is one worthy of study, it is one which explains many things, for it runs—'Dieu s'est dit, "Je ne peux pas être partout," et Il créa la mère.'"

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CHAPTER IV

The passion of love has a danger for very sensitive, reserved, and concentrated minds unknown to creatures of more volatile, expansive, and unreflective disposition.

PAUL FEYGHINE was twenty-one when his mother, following in this the English rather than the Russian custom, formally handed over to her only child their family estates in the Moscow Government. In spite or perhaps because of the cosmopolitan life he had been made to lead as child and youth, the young man lavished on his father's country all the devotion and enthusiasm natural to a temperament which was English in its reserve and passionately idealistic in its Russian aspect.

What the British Empire has come to mean to so many men of English and Scotch birth, Russia became to the son of the man who had perished in what is not unreasonably regarded by Russians as the last of the holy wars. Young Feyghine believed that in the far future his father's country would lead the world of thought and of humanitarianism, if not of material progress, and he had, even as a young officer in the Guard, and while occupying a pleasant sinecure at Court, become a disciple of Tolstoi, that great constructive thinker and dreamer, who was then much better known in his own land than in the wider world he has since conquered.

So it was that Paul Feyghine, greatly to his mother's

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surprise and chagrin, resigned his post at Court, and set out to fulfil his ideal of life on his own estates. At first the prestige attaching to his father's name, and the fact that he was the god-son of a powerful and popular Grand Duke, stood the young man in good stead with the local officials. His experiments were therefore looked at with indulgent eyes, and his practical schemes for bettering the lot of his peasantry applauded. Thus were spent not unhappy years which, even if they destroyed some of Feyghine's Utopian ideals, transformed him from an enthusiastic instinct-led boy into a thoughtful and reasoning man.

To Madame Feyghine this time was one of sore trouble. But it was not in her nature to repine outwardly; she saw the rocks ahead, but believed that her own good seamanship would at last steer her son into safe haven, and in order to provide herself with congenial companionship, she fetched her niece, the seventeen-year-old Anne Domville, from England.

The young girl's sojourn in Russia proved a complete success. Paul was far too deeply absorbed in the work to which he had put his strong young hands to spare time for love. Some day, no doubt, he would meet a Kitty, or better still a gentle submissive Sonia, for the latter was his favourite among his hero's heroines. Meanwhile, having no sister to share his enthusiasms, he was graciously pleased to make a humble friend and confidant of his English cousin. Then, at the end of twelve months, Anne went back to England, and the time she had spent in Russia became an exquisite, dreamlike memory.

Years went on, and life with the mother and son seemed always the same. Feyghine remained absorbed in, and apparently contented with, the life he had planned out for himself, while he was ever ready to act as courteous host to Madame Feyghine's English

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friends and relatives. Among the latter he had soon singled out for special affection his first cousins, that is, Anne and Francis Domville. The latter, who was rather older than himself, impressed the more simple-hearted Paul as a delightful specimen of that true man of the world who is equally at home in castle, camp, and cottage.

Then, with what seemed at the time bewildering suddenness, though Madame Feyghine had been expecting it to happen long before it did so, the blow fell. Paul Feyghine, acting in obedience to feelings and to a conception of duty with which his mother had no sympathy, had engaged in war with that bureaucracy which then held Russia in its grip, and had come off hopelessly worsted. His experiments as a liberal and enlightened landowner, at first regarded with indulgent good-nature by those who represented in his province a paternal despotism, had gone too far; in other words, the English half of Feyghine had proved too thorough. So it was that, after a long period of friction with the local authorities, he received from his god-father, the Grand Duke Paul, a friendly warning, intimating that he would do well to leave his estates, and travel for a while.

Thanks in a great measure to Madame Feyghine's worldly intelligence and thought for the future, the retreat was made in good order. What more natural than that the mother and son should make a long sojourn in England, where the former had many relations and considerable money interests? As for the young man himself, thus roughly uprooted from all he cared for and from all he had achieved,—he alone knew at what cost,—he felt quite indifferent as to where he went; but English after all was his mother tongue, and so he consented to spend in England what he had firmly resolved should only be one year of exile.

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That had been long ago—so long ago that to both mother and son the years spent by them in the country immediately after Paul's majority seemed to have belonged to another life.

And now——? Now Feyghine was nearly forty, and something like a third of his already long life had been spent out of Russia. True, that during the last ten years he had gone back from time to time to his own country and to his own estates, but the old interests, the old enthusiasms, were no longer his. In England he had become the housemate of his cousin, Francis Domville, and for a while he had seen through the other's eyes, coming in touch with what he felt to be a wider, as well as an infinitely pleasanter, form of existence. The life of a Russian landed proprietor, that which he had once thought so broad and so full of beneficent action, now seemed, in view of what had happened to himself, utterly sterile as well as narrow.

Yet now and again Feyghine's conscience would bitterly upbraid him. He knew that from the point of view of the great thinker who had inspired his youth, he had fallen from grace, and sometimes this knowledge troubled him deeply. During those brief, and, as time went on, often recurring moments of discomfort and remorse, he told himself that some day he would go back and once more set his hand to the plough; once more take up his difficult and thankless task among those human beings to whom each Russian landed proprietor surely owes a duty not unlike that which the civilized father owes to his children. But that day which he dreaded, and for which his conscience called, never came,—instead, there leapt into his life, with terrible suddenness, a devastating passion for a woman who, his intellect told him, was unworthy, but who held him as time went on more and more closely in her bonds.

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Before this occurred, however, Paul Feyghine had already formed a very different, but none the less real, sentimental tie—he would have called it friendship—with his own kinswoman, Francis Domville's only sister, the now widowed Anne Leycester.

Natural blood relationship may help amazingly, or go far to destroy, such an intimacy as that which soon linked together Anne Leycester and Paul Feyghine. The very interval which had elapsed between their old and their fresh knowledge of one another had made of them a new man and woman, as well as virtual strangers the one to the other, and kinship alone at first threw them into a renewed companionship which neither would otherwise have sought.

That instinctive and compelling absorption in another human being which we call the passion of love has many Protean disguises, and of these perhaps not the least dangerous, because apt to prove the most enduring, is concern for the soul and spiritual welfare of the beloved.

—Such was the disguise in which was clothed what all too soon became Mrs. Leycester's secret, intense devotion to Feyghine. Her knowledge of the eager, happy life he had once led in Russia, her acquaintance with his early ideals, gave her the key to much that was unquiet and unsatisfied in his nature. Thus it was that, from the first dawn of their renewed friendship, Anne was able so to use her knowledge of the past as to make her alone Paul's intimate among the many Englishwomen with whom he was brought in social contact. Among these ladies there were certain fair sentimentalists who found the Russian's personality sufficiently enigmatic to make him worthy of pursuit; but never did human quarry elude agreeable capture with such surprising ease, and Mrs. Leycester was spared the pain of hearing her cousin's name coupled

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with that of any of those women who proclaimed themselves her friends.

There had been a summer, during the second year spent by the Feyghines in England, when, with all the world,—their world,—away, the two cousins had been constantly together, still engaged in picking up the threads which had bound them so closely and so innocently in their early youth during the year Anne had spent in Russia.

Paul had thrown himself, with the energy which belonged to the English part of his character, into the arrangements concerned with the foundation in London of a Russian hospital, and so he had stayed on in town, going almost daily to Sanctuary House, Anne's quiet abode in Westminster.

Even now, when so long a time had sped by, when the feeling which bound her to her cousin had become so infinitely more vital and intense, there were leafy corners of Alsatia, old churchyards now turned into public gardens, and solitary river-side strips of greenery, which, when Anne passed them by, seemed once more instinct with her cousin's presence,—with the presence of that moody, ardent, visionizing Paul, who at that time, if no more later on, had seemed to know how insistent was the call of the life from which he had been wrenched, and who was yet ready to return to that which, in his eyes, was already losing its glamour.

During those weeks of sudden intimacy, the relation of the two had become strangely close. The marriage of first cousins is forbidden by the Greek Church, and though to Feyghine his religion had simply become part of his nationality, custom plays a larger rôle than any of us suspect in the conduct of life.

—Yet, looking back, as she sometimes did, to that first summer of what was to become so long, so true, and, on the man's part, so sexless a friendship, Mrs. Leyces-

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ter knew, with a deeply hidden, painful knowledge, that there had been moments when Paul, who was human, and very human after all, would fain have passed the barrier she had erected between herself and any form of passion. As happens so much more often, both with men and with women, than the world about them suspects, Anne Leycester lived to lament, with deep, voiceless self-accusation, the loss of that which she had unhesitatingly thrust aside as unworthy of the spiritual heights on which she wished to dwell.

In those early days of her widowhood, Mrs. Leycester had known at once too much and too little of life to form a true judgment as to the normal relations of men and women. Her husband had sheltered her from any breath of vulgar evil, and, on the other hand, her peculiar gift of sympathy had given her terrible glimpses into certain abnormal abysses into which the satisfaction of natural instincts can lead human beings.

It is not your wayfarer trudging homewards along the high road who asks counsel as to his course, but the man who has lost his way in a pathless wilderness and sees a friendly guide in every will-o'-the-wisp. Anne Leycester, seeking, and being sought by, the wanderers, refused, and came to know in time that she had refused, her help to the one traveller whom she could have kept on the straight path, and who, as her companion, might have served as a beacon to those in the byways.

Anne could not have told the month, or even, as time went on, the year, but she never forgot the autumn day on which she first became aware that another influence had come into Feyghine's life. It was the end of the summer in which they had seen so much of one another, and she had been away, staying for a month with old friends and relations of her husband. Her first caller on her return had been her brother Francis, and his first words had been of Paul:—

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"What's come over him? I've been back a week and I've hardly seen him! He's out every evening—he drives Heaven knows where every afternoon—or rather I do know, for Barnett met him driving a very pretty woman through Richmond Park. Who are his new friends, Anne? I suppose you've seen something of him this summer?"

—That had been all. Thenceforward, and with a strange sinister suddenness, Francis became quite silent concerning his housemate's private concerns and daily doings. For months Paul scarcely came to Sanctuary House; at one moment he left town for some weeks, and Anne, too utterly surprised and bewildered by the sudden desertion of one who was beginning to be so much to her, did not ask, and was not told, where he had gone.—Then, almost as suddenly as he had stepped out of her life, Feyghine came back into it, aged, altered, subject to moments of keen irritability, evidently ruling the course of his daily life by some compass closely hidden from his only woman friend, and no more, in the sense he had hitherto been, his own master.

So a strange thing came to pass. Anne became, if not his confidant, then his consoler,—the two rôles are often kept distinct. When the other woman proved unkind, and,—what was far more unendurable,—untrue, Anne would assuage the hidden smart in such skilful fashion that the other's cruelty seemed but kindness in disguise, her falseness an unsubstantial fancy of his own. There was thus created between these two people a very peculiar relation, which, while it afforded constant solace to the man, sometimes tried the woman's heart to breaking-point.

In a day when privacy is so difficult of attainment, and when reticence has become so rare, Anne, because she knew that Paul preferred it so, remained deliber-

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ately ignorant of that part of her cousin's life which the direct questioning of either Francis Domville or Madame Feyghine would doubtless have revealed to her. She knew that her Russian cousin's secret tie must be with some woman unknown to the world of which his mother formed part; for in that world all secret ties are known,—or if not known, suspected,—by those who, having no direct concern with the players, see, according to the wise old saw, most of the game going on ceaselessly about them.

Mrs. Leycester was also aware that Madame Feyghine's chief anxiety concerning the matter to which she made frequent, if veiled, allusion, was lest any portion of Paul's large fortune should melt between his Delilah's fingers. "He is not the type of man a woman loves for his beautiful eyes," she had once brusquely exclaimed to her niece, and though Anne had passionately, if silently, disagreed with the mother, she knew that Madame Feyghine was, in this instance, probably right. Paul,—and oh! the shame of it to such a woman as was Anne Leycester,—undoubtedly paid for his footing, not only with his intense, jealous devotion, and the sacrifice of his life and of whatever career he could have hoped to make for himself, but with more tangible offerings. . . .

Anne always knew when her cousin had been lured into some act of foolish prodigality of which he was ashamed, for it was then that he would make through her an act, if not of contrition, then of restitution. The mistress of Sanctuary House had long been Paul Feyghine's almoner, able, through him, to help many who proudly shrank from approaching any source of organized, impersonal philanthropy. The cousins had become gradually aware that at the gates of Anne Leycester's house dwelt many lonely souls, both men and women, compelled by the exigencies of their working lives to

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live within a short distance of the business and pleasure centres of the town. With some of these Mrs. Leycester, as time went on, formed enduring ties, bringing to them, and also receiving from them, much good fellowship and human sympathy. Their joys were simpler, their sorrows more easy to relieve, than was the lot of those who, lacking the saving grace of daily work, filled their days with the seeking of transcendent happiness,—a search often ending in sorrow and unease. So it was to these gently-bred workers, who, alone among modern toilers, suffer uncomplainingly, that Anne's heart went out; it was they who brought back in a great measure her belief in human nature, and whom often, thanks to Paul Feyghine, she was able to help in simple human fashion.

And yet, as time went on, the curious tie which meant so much to Anne Leycester brought with it only pain, and when those who came to her for comfort told of jealousy secretly endured, their words, however eloquent, held up but a dim mirror to the hidden fires warping and searing the heart which had so long been in Paul Feyghine's unknowing and unsuspecting ownership.

How far does close friendship imply complete confidence? Never surely between two human beings of different sex. With one paramount exception,—so paramount and so exceptional that the two feelings remained sharply alien and apart in his heart,—Anne Leycester continued to be the only woman who counted in Feyghine's life. He had the true Russian interest in problems rather than in persons, and with Mrs. Leycester he would discuss, as he never felt tempted to do with anyone else, the hundred and one questions which torment the mind, and exercise the intellect, of every thinking man. Also, it was to him that this reserved and sensitive woman sometimes came for that which

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others sought from herself—advice as to the conduct of life's daily affairs. And yet Anne knew, with a certain if only with an intuitive knowledge, that there was a whole side of Paul Feyghine's life completely hidden from her, a side—and this was hard to bear—unveiled and known in all its details to her own brother, Francis Domville, and, in a certain measure, to her aunt, that is to Paul's mother, Madame Feyghine.

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CHAPTER V

Elle fût née pour plaire aux nobles âmes,
Pour les consoler un peu d'un monde impûr.

It was the day of the fancy dress fête at Hague House, and Mary Wratten, feeling more light-hearted than was her wont, was standing at the door of Mrs. Leycester's house in Westminster. Madame Feyghine regarded hansoms as improper, and four-wheelers as dirty, bourgeois, and above all extravagantly costly, so old Gregor had taken the girl's portmanteau across the Park in the early morning, and Mary was about to enjoy the to her almost unthought-of luxury of a two days' holiday.

Mary Wratten belonged to the great company of young women who, while apparently leading contented and even agreeable lives, seethe with hidden revolt and unfulfilled aspirations. Her position in Madame Feyghine's household was a singularly unnatural one, for she was expected, while playing the rôle of a daughter, to forgo all a daughter's privileges and pleasures. She was plain, and rather sadly aware that she was so, while her staidness of manner, her constant habit of self-effacement, made the unobservant regard her as dull. She was, however, as the few with whom she felt completely at ease were rather ruefully aware, anything but dull; indeed, her life would have been terribly dreary and unsatisfactory but for her satirical sense of humour, and but for her friendship with Anne Leycester.

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The two friends had outwardly little in common. Miss Wratten was entirely lacking in that intangible quality which strews the path of those who possess it with the unsought devotion and intimate confidences of their kind. The element of passion was not only absent from, but positively distasteful to, her temperament. On the other hand, she was unswervingly true to her few deep affections, and to the daily affairs of life she brought dispassionate good sense, a high sense of duty, and, on occasion, a certain wilful blindness to what was ignoble and dishonest. Such people never originate, still less aspire to lead, a forlorn hope, but, once engaged in such emprise, they sometimes contribute greatly to its ultimate success.

Mrs. Leycester's house was an interesting survival of the days when Westminster was in very truth a city where each leisured citizen had his separate house and garden. Sanctuary House, built on the foundations of a much older building, was situated at the south corner of that square which till lately marked the central portion of mediæval Alsatia, and within a few moments' walk of where had once stood the famous Salutation Inn.

When Mrs. Leycester had first discovered, and then made her own, this secluded retreat, she had been regarded by her friends with the unenvious admiration we are all willing to bestow on those whose goodness takes a form quite foreign to that which we regard as our own. That Anne Leycester, as a newly-made widow, should "work in the slums" seemed reasonable, but that she should move her cherished household gods from Mayfair, and actually set them up among those she was supposed to benefit, was going a few steps too far on the road to perfection.

The people who ventured at once to criticize and to

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admire her conduct would have been surprised indeed had they become aware that the slums and their inhabitants played no real part in Anne Leycester's scheme of life. From her first settlement among them she instinctively left them to the tender mercies of the good, —that is, to the energetic and well-organized clergy-women who dwell within the precincts of the Abbey, and to whom the human rookeries, lying at once so near and so far, have always been a happy hunting-ground.

Mrs. Leycester became the owner of Sanctuary House —because it was large,—because it had a garden,— because the name pleased her; perhaps, above all, because it was sufficiently distant from a part of the town with which she had nothing but painful associations, while still near enough to that where dwelt many members of a world with which duty, rather than pleasure, compelled her to keep linked.

Not long before her husband's death, Anne Leycester had experienced both a physical and a mental crisis, and she took refuge in Sanctuary House hoping there to enjoy a period of recuperation after a married life which, as she alone knew, had not satisfied any of the perhaps fantastic cravings of her nature, but had led indirectly to an experience which had altered and embittered her whole conception of human life.

Driven by elements in her own nature to which she had no clue, and hungering for a kind of spiritual sustenance not to be obtained from those whom her mother had taught her to regard as interpreters of the Divine, Anne Leycester drifted into intimate connexion with a society or sect which, while recognizing the existence of sin and suffering, denied that the one was less remediable than the other.

To this society Mrs. Leycester devoted for a while, not only her considerable income, but the whole of her time, strength, and health. She developed,—or perhaps

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it should be said that those about her discovered she possessed,—the gift of healing. If she could not always banish, she could almost always relieve, physical pain; and then, as her spiritual leaders realized that in this woman they possessed a rare and valuable instrument, they urged her to do yet more, and compelled her to join the band of what they termed the Soul-healers.

It was in connection with this special branch of the work—that of receiving sometimes terrible confidences, and of having laid on her sensitive conscience the more terrible onus of decision—that Mrs. Leycester's health suddenly broke down. This gave her husband, a cynical, sensible man of the world, whose one point of idealism centred in his young wife, the opportunity for which he had been biding his time. He persuaded her to withdraw for a season from active participation in what had become the one absorbing interest and occupation of her life; and when she finally recovered her health and mental strength, and was preparing to go back to her work, Mr. Leycester did his wife, as he thought, a further good service, by laying before her clear proof that the small group of people who had founded the society of which she had been perhaps the most distinguished member were unworthy of the trust she had reposed in them. With cruel kindness, she was even shown a document in which those whom she regarded as inspired of God undertook no longer "to molest her," nay more, if need be, actually to eject her from their midst—in consideration of a large donation to their central fund—

There are natures to whom disillusion comes as the greatest and as the least remediable of all misfortunes. Anne Leycester kept secret her deep humiliation, but the revelation injured, and for a while destroyed, her faith in human nature; she felt herself to be of all women the most miserable, while, as time went on, her

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feeling of revolt against what had happened to her became more, rather than less, bitter.

Mrs. Leycester found it impossible wholly to blot out her connection with the people who had betrayed her; for those ailing bodies, and even more ailing souls, who had in the past found healing and comfort from contact with her, sought her out in her retreat, pursuing her with plaintive cries for help. She could not and did not always refuse to grant that which they craved; but she shrank inexpressibly from what she had once welcomed with joyful awe,—that is, her own gift of healing,—and she deprecated the confidences and confessions thrust upon her. She told herself that her eyes were no longer holden; she now saw, or thought she saw, that those sinners who came to her for spiritual advice were seldom sincere in their desire for amendment—that what they sought, and found in her, was a patient, understanding listener, one on whose conscience they could cast the burdens which oppressed their own.

—So it came to pass that the virtue by which Anne Leycester set most store was fortitude; that which endures all things silently, and sues for no compassion. The knowledge that Mary Wratten possessed this virtue to a rare degree was perhaps the chief reason why Mrs. Leycester made of this girl, some six years younger than herself, her only intimate friend.

One room in Sanctuary House, that which, situated on the upper floor, overlooked the shady garden, always contained a guest, but only two people, Mary Wratten and a certain old doctor, knew with absolute knowledge the qualifications which formed the passport to that peaceful haven. These qualifications were friendlessness and approaching death. Mrs. Leycester had rarely occasion to seek outside Alsatia a tenant for her guest-room; indeed, there was generally waiting a group so well qualified for the enjoyment of her hospi-

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tality that the question of choice became each time more grievous.

By a strange irony the slums, as time went on, had come to regard Sanctuary House and its owner with superstitious terror. They knew far more of what went on within its gates than did Mrs. Leycester's large circle of friends and acquaintances, and their knowledge, coupled with reminiscent visions of Anne Leycester's occasional descent into their midst,—for she never refused to exercise her gift when receiving a direct appeal for help from those in dire need,—caused the more thinking among them to regard her as having in her hands the keys of life and death. Children were warned by their mothers to keep away from her gates, and yet, when those same children lay sick, Mrs. Leycester's presence would be urgently implored. . . .

Anne Leycester had come to look upon this, her gift of healing, with fear and repugnance. She scrupulously abstained from making use of it with regard to those who took their last shelter under her roof, and yet it sometimes happened—far oftener than had seemed possible at first—that one of the mysterious guests whom the slums saw borne into Sanctuary House dying, passed out again, not dead, but well. Rest and good food, tender intelligent care, perhaps the mere atmosphere of close human sympathy, not infrequently performed a miracle.

This had come to pass with a Russian refugee who owed his presence in Sanctuary House to the accident that he was a medical man, and to the chance which had brought him, friendless, steeped in poverty and ill, to the knowledge of the doctor who was so often Mrs. Leycester's auxiliary. Before consenting to his removal from the basement room in which he had lived for some two years the life of a complete solitary, Ivan Mitroff—who as a younger

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man had been connected with one of the great benevolent societies in which Russian society delights—had stipulated that he should be allowed to die in peace, and be in no sense exhibited to Mrs. Leycester's circle.

Poverty and loneliness are bitter ordeals, even if self-ordained and to a certain extent self-inflicted. The Russian who had drifted into Sanctuary House was one of those unfortunate human beings who seem born only to act as chorus while others hold the stage; he was almost ludicrously unlike the bomb-bearing Russian familiar to the English imagination. So far as he was anything more than a mere observer, Mitroff was an ardent individualist; he mocked with bitter jeers at those of his fellow-countrymen who show so sublime a belief in the brotherhood of man; he had lost, even if he had ever possessed, all trust in the humanity of individuals, and regarded with equal scorn the oppressors and the oppressed. When he came to know Anne Leycester, his mind, or perhaps his heart, set her in the place of a unique instance.

Ivan Mitroff's desire for privacy had been scrupulously respected, but as time went on he was perhaps sorry he had made the ungracious stipulation, for, as is sometimes the case with those who have led a life unnaturally alienated from their kind, the Russian became, when once more in touch with the living world of men and women, morbidly interested in their doings. Concerning some of Mrs. Leycester's friends, especially such intimates as Paul Feyghine and Mary Wratten, he often betrayed what the latter felt to be an indiscreet and not altogether kind curiosity.

Dr. Mitroff, so she had soon discovered he liked to be called, had an odd attraction for Mrs. Leycester. He was quite unlike any of his predecessors in her guest-room, less grateful and submissive than most of those poor souls had been, but then how much more

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intellectually keen, how much more mentally alive, and that even during those first hours when they had thought him to be dying.

It was of him that Anne spoke the moment of Mary's arrival. "I have been having such trouble," she exclaimed, "with Dr. Mitroff! He declares that if he is well enough to go to the country, he is well enough to go back to his own room, and he refuses obstinately all thought of Gaynesford. I wish, Mary, that you would speak to him—I wish you would point out to him that going away may make just the difference, and enable him to go on with his work without a further breakdown. I know he thinks a great deal of your opinion; he says you are the one practical Englishwoman he has met!"

Now Mary did not share her friend's tolerant kindness for Dr. Mitroff. The Russian had never taken the trouble to be as pleasant to her as he had been to his hostess, and lately Miss Wratten had grown nervously to dislike his inquisitorial and sometimes strangely indiscreet questions. She felt that Sanctuary House would be a pleasanter place when he had left it; still, she turned obediently, and made her way up to the room where she had already spent many hours reading and talking to the man whose first knowledge of really helpful kindness and simple human charity seemed to have been met with there.

A rather fastidious care had been taken to make the guest-room of Sanctuary House as unlike as possible to a hospital ward, and so the room to which Miss Wratten made her way recalled rather a quiet country bedchamber than that of a London house. The panelled walls, painted pale blue, were covered with engravings and colour-prints; and the four-post bed, hung with white and green dimity, was placed opposite three high windows brushed by the leafy branches of the plane-

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trees which shaded the garden below. Even one less observant, less keenly sensitive to the influence of place than was the Russian doctor, might well have gathered health and strength from lying there.

To-day Mitroff was sitting by the middle window, close to a small table now covered with manuscript sheets. He had evidently taken up once more the work of translation by which, since his arrival in England, he earned a poor and precarious living. As Miss Wratten came in and walked towards him, she was struck with sudden pity; for he still looked utterly unable to take up again his struggle with life. Last time she had been here, rather more than a week ago, the shrunken emaciated body had been concealed by bed-clothes; now, the slight bony figure was wrapped in a dressing-gown, and its meagre outlines formed a curious contrast to the big powerful head, made leonine by a crown of long fair hair.

Ivan Mitroff, like so many people who indulge in bitter complaining, passionately deprecated any appearance of pity in those who approached him; he accordingly looked for, and resented, the sudden look of concern which came over the face of his visitor.

He rose ceremoniously, putting his hand to steady himself as he did so on the back of his chair. "As you see, I am up and well," he exclaimed, "nearly ready to return to my subterranean palace! I beg you not to say, as Mrs. Leycester has been saying, that I need a change. I detest the country! I am what you call here a town bird, a gutter-sparrow! I do not wish to owe a favour to anybody. I am being requested to receive a visit from Mrs. Leycester's cousin, my great and wealthy countryman, Paul Feyghine, but I will not see him. I dislike that type of Russian more than you can imagine—"

"—Has he, then, been up to see you?" asked Mary, surprised.

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"No, indeed! He was in the garden with Mrs. Leycester, enjoying—what no one else, I fancy, would enjoy—the sound of his own voice. I suppose that he also will be at your ball this night?"

"It is not exactly a ball," began Mary uncomfortably—

"—It is a far finer affair;" he threw his head back, pursed up his thin mocking mouth, and looked at her maliciously, "it is, at least so I read in the paper, a War Orphans Entertainment. What a grotesque juxtaposition! Only the English would think of putting together those words 'war orphans' and 'entertainment'! You know my sentiments with regard to my so-called country'—he added quickly, "I mean Russia. But, as an impartial judge, I must tell you that Petersburg compares very favourably with London, when the country's sons—poor deluded fools!—are away fighting, killing and being killed. Yes, I must admit the truth; you English take your sorrows gaily. You even dance your war orphans into asylums."

Mary Wratten, as was so often the case when she was talking to Mitroff, was stung into sharp reply. "I do not see what need there is that you should admit anything of the kind. You are a foreigner"—he shook his head and frowned—"of course you are, Dr. Mitroff, and you should not speak as you so often do about England. No one asked you to come here——" He smiled for the first time; the baiting of Miss Wratten was one of Mitroff's new and engrossing pleasures. But before he could make one of his bitter answers, his visitor had again begun speaking: "In fact, only to-day I was thinking how very like you are in your attitude to England to another Russian whom I have lately had the pleasure of seeing," her face broke into sudden, not ill-humoured laughter,—"I hardly dare tell you, Dr. Mitroff, who it was! I wonder if you ever saw or met

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him—the Grand Duke Paul, an oldish man, an uncle, I believe, of the late Tsar?"

"No? Not old 'Boje-moi'?" Mitroff used the irreverent nickname with evident relish. "I cannot say your comparison is taken by me as a compliment; that evil old man has not a drop of human blood in his veins; he is a devil, a positive devil! Would you like me to tell you what he did—how he acted when he was Governor of Moscow?"

"No, please not!" Mary shrank back a little; she had heard Mitroff's tales before.

His mind took a sudden turn: "Oh! it was a long time ago, a very long time ago! And, after all, the fools quite deserved their fate."

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CHAPTER VI

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more—
Nor yours, nor mine—nor slave, nor free:
Where does the fault lie? What the core
Of the wound, since wound must be?

MARY Wratten and Mrs. Leycester sat awaiting their double escort in the drawing-room of Sanctuary House, and silence fell on the room now filled with the afternoon glow of a London summer sunset.

Both hostess and guest had chosen the plainest and least conspicuous of fancy dresses; indeed, the gown of the slightly older woman was almost Quakerish in its simplicity. But Mary—so the other, gazing at her, felt with a certain surprise—looked exceptionally well in a pale blue sacque trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons, fashioned out of a voluminous dress which had been worn by her own long-dead mother during the crinoline period; for Miss Wratten's small income did not permit of such pleasant extravagance as that of a gown of which the wearing must be restricted to one or two occasions.

The apartment in which the two women were sitting opposite to one another was square and lofty, better adapted than are most London drawing-rooms for the display of the beautiful things which went to its spare furnishing. George Leycester had been a collector of that now disappearing type which prefers individual taste to expert judgment. This doubtless was why each of

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the rooms in Sanctuary House was full of unified as well as ordered beauty, set in a singularly still atmosphere of quiet peace.

This room, where Mrs. Leycester and her friend sat in the fast-fading brightness, was lighted on one side by high windows overlooking the shady garden, while on the other a wide casement dominated the stone-paved courtyard, and, beyond, the square of which the house formed a corner. Children at play kept up a shrill roar of sound, which, prolonged far into each night, had become to Anne Leycester so familiar as to be undisturbing.

Sanctuary House had been designed and built when space in London was of little moment, and the living-rooms were all on the ground floor; they stretched out on either side of the broad corridor which filled the centre of the house, and which, beginning at the hall, terminated in a flight of steps leading into the garden.

"Have you heard," said Anne, rather suddenly, "that my brother has had the offer of a very good short let for Gaynesford from foreigners who seem to have heard of the place, and who offered a fantastic sum without even going down to see it?"

Miss Wratten looked up quickly. "And is he going to accept it? I thought he meant to spend the autumn there himself, and then try for another long let."

"Yes, that is what he does mean to do, and so he has refused these people. You have never seen Gaynesford, Mary? It is so beautiful—so unlike any other old house. I adore the place,—every Domville adores it,—and yet I could wish——"

"—And what could you wish?" The question was asked in a rather hard voice.

"Well, I could wish that Francis would make up his mind to sell it. As long as he keeps it he must remain poor, or rather embarrassed, and even Gaynesford is

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not worth such an engagement and marriage as that which so nearly took place the other day. Francis is worthy of something better than that."

"But do good things befall the most worthy?" asked Mary, with perhaps unconscious irony.

"—Yes, and evil things often pass them by," Mrs. Leycester reddened in the half-darkness. She had been puzzled by her friend's attitude during Francis Domville's pursuit of Rose Hassal. There had been moments, both before and since his absence in South Africa, when she had felt that her brother's relationship to Mary Wratten was becoming dangerously close, but Anne was one of those exceptional people who never feel even tempted to interfere in such matters, and so she simply added, more to herself than to her companion: "It's strange that a clever woman like Aunt Letty should have imagined such a marriage likely to satisfy the spiritual—nay, if you like it better, I will say the imaginative—side of Francis's nature."

"Madame Feyghine," observed Mary, very deliberately, "makes small account of the spiritual, still less of the imaginative, side of life. She always reminds me of the story—one of her own most characteristic stories, by the way—of the old Russian princess who died in Paris. You haven't heard it? Ah, even she hasn't dared to tell it before you, Anne, but I will be more bold.—This old Russian princess, anxious to make good her standing in Paradise, sought out St. Peter immediately on her arrival in heaven, and begged him to present her to le bon Dieu. He complied with her request, and, though over-awed for a moment, she soon recovered herself, and observed civilly: 'Charmée de faire votre connaissance; on a souvent entendu parler de Vous dans notre église de la Rue Daru!'"

"Mary! my dear——!"

"—Forgive me, Anne,—but you have there summed up

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Madame Feyghine's philosophy of life. To her, religion, since she became Greek Church,—and it is difficult to believe that she was ever anything else,—is a matter of bon ton. As to love,—you heard what she had to say about love the other day, and then, after all, she spoke before others. To me she is often even more frank"—the speaker's face was now quite hidden from that of the listener. "To do her justice she deals as a rule in generalities, innuendoes, but one can always tell what, or rather whom, she has in her mind. Just now she says that love is a good servant but a bad master."

"That is true," murmured Anne Leycester, "horribly true."

"—And of course in a marriage of convenience," went on Mary Wratten as if she had not heard the interruption, "love, from Madame Feyghine's point of view, is always the good servant who leads the happy pair to the altar. There is something to be said for the point of view——"

The sudden appearance of the two men of whom both women had secretly been thinking, put an abrupt end to their rather odd little conversation. It was still early, and neither Feyghine nor Domville seemed in any haste to go on to Hague House.

Candles were lighted, a lamp was brought in, and for a moment it pleased Mrs. Leycester's fancy to imagine that, so sitting round her in this very room, might have appeared a group of those French émigrés who, rather more than a hundred years ago, took refuge in England. Each of her three visitors looked to-night like reincarnations of eighteenth-century characters, and this was owing, not only to the artistic perfection of their costumes, but even more to certain personal idiosyncrasies, and to the peculiarities of manner and appearance, of each wearer.

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Some ten years before, while spending a summer in France, Feyghine and Domville had been bidden to a fête given at Versailles in the grounds of Trianon. There, amid the glades and bosquets which, to the lover of the old régime, must ever be enchanted ground, during the space of a summer night one of those wonderful reconstitutions of the past in which the French so delight and so excel, had been brought about as if by the wave of a magic wand.

A beautiful Frenchwoman, the great-granddaughter of Marie Antoinette's favourite lady-in-waiting, had consented to fill the rôle of the last Queen of France; and it was she who had asked the tall, fair, almost boyish-looking Englishman Francis Domville then was, to transform himself for a few moonlit hours into Count Axel Fersen, that is, into the one truly romantic and disinterested character among those whom we know to have composed the miniature Court held about the rustic dwellings and fantastic temples of Trianon.

According to tradition, the portrait of Count Fersen, now at Versailles, was painted just before he left the French Court to join Lafayette in America—that is, as he had been habited on the day when he bade the girl-queen good-bye in that brief interview which, even as described in the dry cold language of diplomacy, evokes so moving and pitiful a vision of silent pain and parting. It was this presentment of the most faithful platonic lover known to history which had suggested the pale blue and silver uniform worn to-night by Francis Domville. As to Paul Feyghine, his tall broad-shouldered figure looked more than usually to advantage in a magnificent, if rather barbaric, dress copied from a painting of that Grand Duke who afterwards became the Emperor Paul I., and who so greatly amazed the super-civilized Parisians during his sojourn in their midst.

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To the two cousins, the costumes worn by them to-night recalled one of the most delightful and shadowless episodes of their joint youth, and the fact that both men had already worn these fancy dresses made them move and look at ease in a sense that few modern masqueraders can ever hope to do.

And yet, even before the lights had been brought in, —indeed, while he was advancing towards her in the half darkness,—Mrs. Leycester had become aware that something was more wrong than usual with Paul Feyghine. He had caught her hand, and held it in what she felt to be an unconsciously tight grip for longer than the conventional moment of greeting; and then, a moment later, when she was able to see his face, she had been startled by its worn look of settled weariness and suppressed pain. Three days had gone by since he and she had met, and it seemed to her that in those three days her cousin had aged years.

A feeling of passionate anger against the mysterious woman who had the power of so making him suffer, filled Anne Leycester's heart. It seemed strange that she, to whom so many men and women told their secrets, should remain unknowing of that in Feyghine's life which could make him look as he was looking to-night. She wondered why he had not come to her before, earlier in the day, when they would at least have been alone together, and when she could have tried, as she so often did try and with success, to make him thrust away, if not forget, that which burnt his heart and stung his pride.

But this time Paul had not chosen to come to her, and so, when he sank heavily into a chair set back in the shadow of the room, Anne made a determined effort to turn her thoughts from the bowed, massive figure, now so incongruously clad in scintillating cloth of gold and gleaming brilliant splashes of colour.

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Francis Domville seemed in good spirits; he was explaining, not without a certain humour, the surprise, almost bewilderment, he had felt during his interviews with the lady whose mission in life, and one of which she was legitimately proud, seemed to be the organization of "monster" charity entertainments. He described the difficulty which he and the other men taking part in a certain costume dance had had in making it plain that on no account would they consent to be described in the programme as "Heroes who have Bled for Queen and Country." Even so, they had been compelled to consent with a good grace to seeing their several names figure in "A Minuet Danced by a Group of England's Fairest Daughters and Bravest Sons!"

As he talked and laughed, the speaker glanced approvingly at Mary Wratten, telling himself that to-night she looked, if not pretty, then certainly charming, and quaintly "in the picture"; for the powdered hair, the touch of rouge, even the patch placed at the corner of her short upper lip, had blotted out the plainness and softened the angles of her face, adding a grace which had before been lacking to her upright, dignified carriage.

Domville was very fastidious where women were concerned. While a passionate admirer of beauty, he was yet inclined to rate higher than do most men qualities which seldom go hand in hand with beauty, and which indeed seem awarded to certain women in order to compensate them for their lack of what is conventionally styled feminine attraction. These qualities were very apparent in Mary Wratten, and during the last few days Domville had become more aware of that fact than he had ever been. Had her eyes been as bright as her wit, her skin as flawless as her loyalty, her mouth and chin as perfectly formed as were her heart

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and mind, he might to-night have told her that he loved her,—even as it was, something a thought more intimate and familiar than usual became apparent in his manner; but there rose no answering warmth of response from the woman sitting so near to him in the shaded lamplight, and he told himself, rather sadly, that she also was evidently lacking in that tenderness which must be surely present in any woman worthy of being loved for herself alone. It was fortunate for Domville that at no time had he included Miss Hassal in that minority.

At last Mrs. Leycester rose and began moving restlessly about the room. She stopped a moment by her writing-table, and, bending over it, sorted the letters and papers with which it was littered into little heaps. As she did so, she asked herself, not for the first time, what was to be the end of it all? Were they two, she and her cousin, Paul Feyghine, to go on year after year with that pretence of close friendship which had in it so little of real confidence? Was her part in his life to be limited to that of the one woman in whose presence he could throw off his mask—that of the agreeable, cosmopolitan man of the world, whose task it was to show the modern Russian in a pleasanter light than English society had hitherto painted him? This was Madame Feyghine's view of her son's mission in life, and sometimes he lived up to his mother's ideal surprisingly well.

But when he was alone with Anne Leycester? Ah! then, the real Paul could be himself,—silent, moody, irritable, or kind, helpful, even tender as a friend might be. But, as time went on, these softer moods became more rare; for, when all was going well between himself and the woman of whom Mrs. Leycester knew both so much and so little, he honoured

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Anne but seldom with his company. It was when things went wrong, when he was torn by fierce jealousy and racked with suspicion, that he would haunt Sanctuary House, throwing himself with eager absorption into whatever work for others was taking up Anne Leycester's thoughts and time; and she, for the space of a few days, perhaps for as long as a fortnight, would half believe the spell was broken, that Feyghine had wrenched himself free,—but there always came a day when the lure called him, and then for a while Anne would would see him no more.

Each sense has its own special chord of memory; Mrs. Leycester, mechanically moving backwards and forwards a number of ivory figures standing on an Italian cabinet, suddenly saw a vision of Paul's face as he had been wont to look at her during that summer when he had mutely asked for more than she had been willing to yield, and as this vision came to her, one of the ivory figures she was holding suddenly fell to the ground—Feyghine started violently; then he got up, and came over to the corner of the room where his cousin was standing.

—For a moment there was silence between them; then Anne turned towards him. "Paul," she asked in a whisper, "is anything the matter?—Are you ill to-night?"—her habitual self-suppression had deserted her, and she kept her face bent down, afraid lest he should see the tears standing in her eyes.

"No," he said dully, "I am not ill, but there was—there is—a special reason why I had hoped to escape the going to Hague House to-night. Francis had actually found a substitute, I mean for the dances in which I am to take part. But my mother—you know she has second sight where I am concerned—discovered in some way that I meant to play false," he tried to smile, "and she was determined I should go through with it. The woman of whom Francis is talking, she who has

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organized the costume dances, happened to come to South Street to-day, and so I found myself doubly pledged. Naturally I feel 'put out,' and you know I hate that feeling!"

Without giving her time for comment or reply, he turned abruptly towards the others, and, raising his voice, called out: "Surely it's time we should be starting."

Then, or so it seemed to Anne Leycester, Feyghine deliberately arranged to avoid what would have been the enforced solitary intimacy of the long *tête-à-tête* drive from Westminster to Kensington. When came the moment of departure, it was Mary Wratten who, to her vague surprise and disappointment, found herself sitting by Paul's side in the private hansom which was one of his few personal luxuries; while the brother and sister, equally surprised and perhaps even more disappointed than had been Miss Wratten, followed in silence together.

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CHAPTER VII

. . . . . ! In the street
They hear the twittering of little feet,
The rocking of the cradle in their hearts.

ALL human beings are dependent on the setting in which they find themselves, and this is even truer of women than of men. Such a setting as that of the patch and powder fête now in progress in the gardens of Hague House was singularly unfitted to Anne Leycester. To the few present who were really conversant with the art and literature of that vanished England which those who had organized the fête had sought to reconstitute, Mrs. Leycester, almost alone of the company, looked as if she had stepped from the past into the present. But this only made her the more out of touch with the joyous masqueraders whose assumption of the dress of other days not only failed to disguise, but seemed actually to enhance, their modernity.

Both Feyghine and Francis Domville had been compelled to hasten off immediately on their arrival, for the dances in which they were to take part were among the first items of the long programme which was to make this charity fête the most brilliant affair of the kind ever seen in London.

It was now half-past eleven; some two hours must go by before Mrs. Leycester would have the heart to cut short Mary Wratten's obvious enjoyment of the fantastic scene. So it was that at last, oppressed by the

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noise, heat, and movement out of doors, Anne, with some difficulty, sought and found the kindly mistress of Hague House, and obtained permission to spend a quiet hour in one of the now deserted rooms of the great house.

It was with a pleasant feeling of restfulness and peace that she made her way slowly through each of the cool dimly-lighted chambers,—Hague House still held the fort against electric light,—which seemed instinct with memories of the noble-minded, of the great, aye and of the eccentric folk, who had passed there such contented and enchanted days. She was intimately acquainted with the history of this wonderful old house, and as a girl she had spent here many happy hours; some of the long dead people, who had come and gone, lived and loved, in the rooms through which she was now walking, seemed to her more familiar, known with a more intimate knowledge, than even the present gracious owners of Hague House, whose society, whose actual physical presence, she had so often enjoyed.

And then, when close to the quiet, retired room where she desired to spend her time of waiting, Anne Leycester met with a curious, and to herself a very startling, experience.

While walking down a short corridor, she was suddenly aware that through the gloom there came, advancing towards her, a tall, slight woman, whose grey gown seemed to float about her, and whose powdered hair, drawn loosely from her forehead, was partly concealed by a white lace coif.

As the figure glided nearer and nearer, Anne felt a thrill of fear. To her the spiritual world had ever seemed very close; was it not possible, nay, even likely, that the stranger now coming towards her with steady, unfaltering steps, belonged to that great, vanished company who had so much more right to this noble place and its manifold beauties than had any of those forming the

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motley crowd gathered here to-night? And yet the pale, luminous face, whose dark eyes now sought hers with a look of rather searching inquiry, expressed a very human suffering and revolt, as well as poignant loneliness. And so it was that, as the graceful form drew near, Anne Leycester's fear became merged in pity, and in that longing to help, which was the most instinctive as well as the most tender trait in her nature.

—Then, with a feeling of recoil rather than of relief, Mrs. Leycester suddenly realized that the unsubstantial, ethereal-looking figure, the tragic face, and the questioning, passionate eyes, composed the counterfeit presentment of her own self. The door of the last of the short corridors or lobbies connecting the great rooms the one with the other, was panelled with a tall, rimless mirror —and had thus created the illusion which had for a moment so strangely deceived her.

Before wholly destroying that illusion, Mrs. Leycester covered her face with her hands—hiding even from herself that which she had taken for an unquiet and still passion-laden spirit. And she asked herself some searching even agonized questions,—Did she go, thus revealed, through the world?—Did her soul confess so clearly through her eyes its craving for spiritual solace?—Did her agnostic glance so meet those who came to her for what she needed far more than they, for she had once possessed in fullness the faith and hope after which they only groped? More probing question still,—Did her face express to others, as it had done to herself, the longings of a strong, ardent nature for something more simply human that that which those about her—deep in her heart but one name was murmured—seemed willing to vouchsafe?

She slowly uncovered her eyes, and looked earnestly at the figure, at once so unreal and so familiar, standing opposite to her. The silvery gown, the lace crossover

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and cap, so utterly unlike her usual sombre simplicity of attire, nay, even the powdered hair, formed a curious disguise, and gave her an odd unreal look of early eager youth.

And yet, as her face gradually regained its usual serenity, Anne Leycester was able to assure herself that her secrets were her own. Not even Mary Wratten, the younger woman on whose strong, upright nature she sometimes leaned, knew of those inner struggles which, till to-night, had been partly hidden even from her own heart; as for the others who came about Sanctuary House, they were not sufficiently at leisure from themselves to waste a questioning thought on "the holy widow,"—for such, Anne had learned with repugnance, had been the nickname bestowed on her by Rose Hassal.

As she walked on she regained complete possession of herself, but the strange experience had shaken her nerve; and she was still trembling when she found herself at last in the group of apartments known to those familiar with Hague House as the west rooms. There she quickly made her way to the last room of all, that which is now lined with the portraits of those whose sighs and laughter once echoed there, for it was here that the most famous of the châtelaines of this famous house loved to entertain her friends. To-night the room seemed oppressively empty, and Anne instinctively made her way across to the widely-opened window, and walked out on to a stone balcony, where she leant over the balustrade which overhung the still, fragrant parterres of a Dutch garden.

Standing there, her sad heart soothed by the darkness, Anne Leycester felt vaguely glad that an invisible cordon prevented the merry, noisy crowd from surging there, as they had surged over the other beautiful gardens and bosquets hedged in by the high trees. From the left were wafted the sounds of music, of laughter, and of murmuring voices, sharply defined against the steady, continuous roar of the distant London traffic, and yet

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never had Anne felt more utterly and more painfully solitary than she did to-night—

At last the opening and shutting of a distant door, the fall of quick, firm footsteps hurrying through the suite of rooms which lay behind her, caused Mrs. Leycester to turn round expectantly; she was glad to be relieved, even for a few moments, from her lonely vigil, for only one of those already familiar with Hague House, and therefore probably known to herself, could be coming here with so sure and confident a step.

A moment later, his massive, and to-night rather barbarically brilliant, figure successively framed in each of the glass Italian Renaissance doors, she saw Paul Feyghine striding towards her. In this old house, the scene of so many romantic and tragic occurrences, her Russian cousin looked, in his brightly-coloured and gleaming uniform, the embodiment of a country and century in which terrible crimes seemed to grant the opportunity for the exercise of heroic virtues.

But, although the sight of her cousin Paul filled her with unreasoning content, Mrs. Leycester remained concealed on the balcony. Some obscure instinct bade her wait there till she should be seen, discovered, by the man who was evidently seeking her.

Feyghine, when he entered the darkened room where he expected to find Mrs. Leycester, stood still for a moment looking about him uncertainly—

All at once he caught sight of the grey figure standing outside the open window, and hastening to her: "I was told I might find you here," he began abruptly, —then came out and stood beside her, saying for the moment no other word, looking down, as she had but just before looked down, into the lovely, solitary garden below.

Again he spoke, and she felt that the shadow which had arisen between them that night in Sanc-

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tuary House had suddenly lifted. "Ah! Anne, you are wise to have taken refuge here! How strange to think that once I, too, delighted in all that kind of thing!"—he flung out his right hand towards the place from whence came the sounds of distant music and of human stir. "Even now, I fancy Francis enjoys it!"—

There was a pause—Paul looked round, and met Anne's gaze of steady, rather sad, questioning. "Sometimes I wonder what I am doing here," he muttered, "I mean in this country. I ask myself, in a kind of stupor, why I am not at Pologui?—Do you remember Pologui, Anne?"—a strange and bitter smile distorted for a moment his stern, secretive mouth. "How young I was! What plans I made! But the child of those days was not the father of the man I am to-day."

"And why have you altered?" asked Anne in a troubled whisper—there was knocking at her heart a premonition of coming pain and knowledge; "why did you not go back to Pologui years ago? Surely you would be happier there than you are here?"

Intimate in a sense as the two cousins were, and as they had long been, Paul Feyghine had never spoken to Anne Leycester as he was now, to-night, speaking to her. He had never alluded,—at least, never since the first days of their friendship,—as directly as he was now doing to the idle, purposeless life he was leading, and his face was set in hard lines of pain and self-accusation.

In answer to her question he shrugged his shoulders with the gesture which was one of his few foreign peculiarities; and then, as midnight began to chime from the many clocks in the old house, he suddenly lifted his bowed head and straightened himself—it was as if he had heard a signal. "I must go now," he said, briefly. "Indeed, I came to tell you that I must give up the pleasure of going back with you all. As I told you this evening, I have—an engagement; and I have

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arranged with Francis that he is to take you and Mary back to Westminster."

Anne turned away,—she feared lest her companion should see the feelings of anger, aye and of shame, which possessed her. Could not the siren who held Paul in her toils spare him for the few hours he had promised to others? Perhaps the mysterious woman, who so twisted and deflected his life from all that was good and worth doing, was even now waiting for him, within a few yards of where they stood. Doubtless he had but left her alone "till midnight," that he might, after seeking out his cousin,—for Paul Feyghine was ever observant of the minor courtesies of life—return with the news that, after all, he had managed to make good his "escape."

Feyghine guessed nothing of what was passing through the mind of the silent woman standing beside him. He laid his hand on hers,—a kindly, affectionate gesture of farewell,—and then, still lingering, uttered in a quick, preoccupied voice, what was to Anne Leycester a most unexpected and amazing question: "Is it true," he asked, "that once,—I mean during those years when we were first in England, and before we saw much of you,—you possessed the power of curing illness, of making the sick well?"

"I do not know if it was true," Anne Leycester answered in a low, reluctant voice: "looking back, I sometimes wonder how far the whole thing was real—I mean, of course, how far the effect was produced by me, and not by the imagination of those I tried to help. My husband was always quite sceptical about it all."

She was trembling,—this was the first time she had uttered the doubt which justified, to her own conscience, her present neglect of what had once seemed to her a ministry bestowed on her by God. She looked up into Paul's sombre face, and then, with a swift revulsion of

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feeling, forgot the purport of his odd question, told herself with secret exultation that not so does a man look when he is about to join the woman he loves. Were the bonds that bound him at last becoming loosened? Was her cousin going to this tryst as reluctantly as men are wont to do when a secret lassitude takes the place of what they once called love?

Feyghine's face was grey with fatigue and depression; he sighed a curious, heartfelt, involuntary sigh. "If that is so,—if it is only the effect of imagination,"—he said, still in the quick yet hesitating tones she found so unlike his own, "you have, of course, no power of influencing the physical state of children—I mean of sick children?"

Anne waited,—the subject was to her singularly painful, and one that happened to touch her heart and conscience very nearly. But if this odd uncalled-for discussion kept Paul a few moments longer by her side, then indeed the awakening of old doubts and difficulties was of small moment, and she answered resolutely:—

"But that, on the contrary, was my chief power; I was always singularly successful with sick children. The knowledge that this was so is the only thing which has made me doubt of late years whether George—my husband— was right after all. Even now," her voice dropped, and became self-questioning, "I never refuse to go and see a sick child. But you see, Paul,"—and, though she uttered his name, she spoke rather to herself than to her companion,—"the exercise of this power had such a strange effect on my health; sometimes I used to feel—even, I believe, to look—as if I was dying; and so George made me promise not to go on with it."

There was a long pause. Paul Feyghine seemed to have forgotten his mysterious engagement. He went on staring down into the lantern-lit darkness of the fragrant, formal garden, and Anne wondered whether

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the bright, crude tints of the uniform he was wearing made his rough-hewn profile seem paler and sterner than usual.

"You never refuse to see a sick child, even now?" he repeated, as if he had not heard the rest of what she had been saying. "If that is really so, then—then I wonder, Anne, if you would come with me now,—to-night,—for I am going to a house where a child lies very ill?"

He turned and looked down into Mrs. Leycester's face with a dumb, despairing appeal which filled her eyes with sudden tears, and thrust the whys and wherefores, which first flushed and then blanched her cheeks, far back into her heart.

"Of course,—let us start at once! Why did you not ask me before?"—She turned from the balcony, and led the way swiftly through the rooms which were more familiar to her than to Paul Feyghine.

As the two passed through the mirror-panelled lobby where Mrs. Leycester had seen that strange apparition of herself, she gazed rather fearfully at the figure which again seemed hastening to meet her; but the look of loneliness was gone from the pale, luminous face, and the dark eyes no longer seemed to question the benignity of God.

Together the cousins made their way into the wide hall, already filled with the stir and movement of departure; and while Mrs. Leycester was finding her long, thin silk cloak, and the hood which she was now glad formed part of her costume, Feyghine wrote the pencilled note which was to tell the two whom it concerned that Anne Leycester had been compelled to leave early.

As they passed out into the open air, her companion laid his hand on her shoulder, and so guided her down the narrow path edging the roadway through the park, Anne moving as in a dream, while yet intensely

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conscious of the grasp of the strong fingers which seemed to burn and mark her for his own.

Suddenly Paul uttered an exclamation, and turned sharply to one side, crushing Mrs. Leycester and himself into the bushy hedge. As she looked round, startled and bewildered, she saw that what had roused his apparent anger, and caused him to swerve from the footpath, had been a belated arrival, a carriage in which were crowded a party of noisy merry-makers, the sound of whose talk and shrill laughter echoed long after they had swept by. "I know those people," Feyghine said roughly, as if in unwilling answer to Anne's unspoken question," and I did not wish them to see us."

At last the two passed through the high gilt gates which shut out the wooded wilderness of Hague House from modern London, and still Paul kept his hand on Anne's shoulder. She felt herself taken across the broad road, and so guided to a small side street, where a solitary hansom was waiting; Feyghine almost lifted her into it, then took his place by her side, and, with no word to the driver, they started off in complete silence.

Anne Leycester, bewildered, excited, feeling in more real communion with the man by her side than she had felt for years, could not see the face of her companion, for he leaned forward, his arms crossed, staring out into the brightly lighted streets, where already the traffic was growing perceptibly thinner.

"Have we far to go?" she asked at last.

"Yes, very far; I'm afraid you will be tired," and again he fell into the strange silence which told of anguish, and of almost unbearable suspense.

And then, to the woman by his side, came a sensation of deep shame and of sharp self-rebuke. Without knowing that she did so, passing one of those harsh, involuntary judgments we are all apt to pass, even on

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those whom we love, Anne Leycester had considered that hidden side of Feyghine's life as a lamentable surrender to those lower impulses which, once indulged, so soon become, with certain natures, imperious appetites.

Some day, so she had believed, and believing had prayed with earnest supplication that it might be sooner rather than later, he would surely win back possession of himself, and become again what she had once known him. Meanwhile, she had cherished the consoling belief that the higher side of his nature, all that of which he was unashamed, belonged to her,—that hers was the gold, the other woman's but the dross. And now, to-night, she learned that Paul's Capua held that purest and most attaching of human inmates,—a little child. The knowledge brought with it the strangest mingling of jealousy, amazement, and relief.

The elimination of the child is one of the most curious, and in some ways disquieting, portents of modern intrigue. In the many stories of secret and unlicensed love,—most of them told her by women, for men are more chary of such confidences,—to which Anne Leycester listened, the possible or actual child played no part. So it was that in her imagination, which had remained unsullied in spite of her wide knowledge of the byways of human nature, unholy passion was necessarily sterile.

Paul Feyghine, so much was surely clear, had accepted the consequences of his action in a nobler spirit; but now, for the first time, Anne realized how far outside his inner life she had been during all these years of apparent intimacy, and the feeling brought with it anger as well as pain.

"What is the matter with the child?" she asked at last, in a voice which to herself sounded harsh and unsympathizing.

Feyghine started violently,—"My mother would call

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it inflammation of the lungs. They have some new name for it now. There is a fountain in the garden of the house—" he hesitated painfully—" to which I am taking you, and she was allowed, being very hot at the time, to get wet. She's been ill about a week, but, till three days ago, I knew nothing of it. Even her nurse, a good sort of woman, a Spaniard, who has been with her since she was born, did not realize the gravity of the case. She's always been perfectly well—splendidly healthy." He stopped abruptly, then went on, " I've had Sir Thomas Day up twice; he was very kind—he sent a good nurse—there ought to be two, but Concepcione, the Spanish nurse, would not hear of giving the child over to a stranger, so she and I sat up with her last night."

Then his eyes met those of the woman sitting by his side, and emboldened him to say, to do what an Englishman in his place would probably have refrained from saying and doing. " Her name's Nicolette——" there was a boyish touch of eagerness and shyness in his voice. " Perhaps you will allow me to show you her portrait?" With a brusque movement he drew an old-fashioned miniature case from the left breast pocket of the uniform he was wearing.

Anne bent forward and gazed, God alone knew with what conflicting feelings of painful interest, jealousy, and reluctant tenderness, at what she believed to be a portrait of Paul's child. At last she drew back, vaguely disappointed. The baby face, framed in dark curls, was dark and elfish.

" It's a bad miniature," he said, rather hastily, " done two years ago. She's not,—never was,—really like that. Now *this* is a really fine piece of work," —he turned the old-fashioned case over, and Anne's heart suddenly stood still. Was she going to be shown—was she so at last to see, the face of the

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woman, of the rival, of whom she thought so constantly? But what she saw, gleaming palely in the wavering light, was the living face of a man, possessing Paul's firm, secretive mouth, Paul's intensely blue, strangely enigmatic eyes. As she gazed at the miniatures she remembered that her cousin, during the months she had spent in Russia, had once shown her this portrait of the father to whom he had been as a little child so passionately devoted, and whose death, during the Russo-Turkish war, had been the tragedy, the glorious tragedy, of his boyhood.

How Paul must care, how intensely Paul must love the sick child to whom he was taking her, thus to bear her face and that of Nicholas Feyghine, together, on his breast!

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CHAPTER VIII

. . . The tower of brick, seventeen feet square and fifty-eight feet high, was probably built by Sir John Spencer. . . . Here, at a time when the tower was let out in apartments, Goldsmith often lay concealed from his creditors. Under a pressing necessity, he there wrote his "Vicar of Wakefield," and first received from the bookseller, Newbery, £40.

Old Guide-book to Islington.

"Look, Anne, there's the house!" Feyghine exclaimed suddenly—"the house at the corner, that with the tower."

They were now driving through a region of solitary thoroughfares, of narrow byways, and of old-world terraces, here and there embellished by one of those substantial Georgian houses which lend character and dignity to the High Street of many a small country town. Not such, however, was the building indicated by Feyghine; for it was strangely unlike the houses composing the small square of which it formed a corner. A group of rough-cast, white-washed gables was massed about the base of a square tower, sharply defined against the star-powdered summer sky, and, save for the light which came from two small apertures half-way up the tower, the house seemed shrouded in darkness and in sleep, each of the five windows, which formed irregular patches on the white surface of the gabled annexe being closely shuttered.

"I have often wished you to see this place——"

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Feyghine was turning to his companion, and he spoke with a touch of excitement in his manner. "If it were in any other part of London—in the City or even more in Westminster—how you Londoners would cherish it! Why, part of it must be as old as the Lollards' Tower —put up, I should think, at the same time, perhaps by the same builder, for the brickwork is much the same. As for the house, it has remained curiously untouched, for so far it has been to no one's interest to improve,—I mean to spoil it. In fact, it's the only place I've ever seen that enables one to understand how my English ancestors—yours and mine, Anne,—really lived. Well, they weren't so much to be pitied, after all!"

Anne remained silent. They were now close to the white walls, actually below the two sharply pointed roofs which threw a deep shadow on the rough-cast below, and still there could be seen no aperture giving access to this strange abode; but the cab turned quickly to one side, down a narrow thoroughfare, and there, tucked away in a deep embrasure at the foot of the red-brick tower, was a low, nail-studded door.

As her cousin pushed a large old-fashioned latch-key into the lock, Anne Leycester realized, again with a jealous pang clutching at her heart, that this strange house knew Paul Feyghine as master. Following him in, she stumbled over the worn stone threshold. Was it a good or an evil presage? The same thought occurred to them both, and suddenly Feyghine turned round, his face convulsed with feeling. He bent forward and clasped her hands,—"I think you know," he said hoarsely, "how grateful I am to you for coming here—"

They were now standing in a small panelled hall,—scarcely a hall, more a low, broad passage flagged with stones, which evidently formed the base of the tower. Opposite to the square aperture through which they, had just passed was a heavy oak door set wide open

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giving access to a mysterious moonlit garden, whence could be heard the monotonous plashing of a fountain.

Sensitive as are certain exceptional human beings to the spiritual atmosphere which permeates every inhabited dwelling, that in which Anne Leycester now found herself disturbed and fretted her; and yet she recognized that it was not evil in the grosser sense—rather did it lack any trace of the habitual presence of normal men and women. She told herself that this old, old house was doubtless possessed by those, now long dead, who had once lived, loved, and sorrowed here.

As she stood gazing out into the garden, there also came to Anne a strange impression of overpowering, almost cloying sweetness; with relief she realized that this might well be only the pungent night scents of flowering bushes, drifting in from the dark mysterious garden.

At last Feyghine turned towards her—"Shall we go up now?" he said abruptly, "it's a long way, and the only staircase is in the tower." While he was speaking he had drawn aside a curtain, and was leading the way up a winding stair of which the broad stone steps were worn hollow in the middle with the passage of many feet.

Then, with a strange suddenness, or so it seemed to his companion, a door set in the uneven, immensely thick brick wall of the tower swung open, revealing on the threshold an extraordinary figure—that of a short man clad in the white linen costume of a French cook.

Mrs. Leycester's glance travelled on; behind and above the rather fantastic figure, dominating a large octagon room, in the centre of which stood a flower-strewn supper-table, was a superb full-length portrait of a dancer, so life-like and vital a counterfeit present-

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ment of brilliant, triumphant womanhood, of lithe, natural grace, that Mrs. Leycester's eyes dilated with instinctive recoil.

The chef showed no surprise on seeing Feyghine and Mrs. Leycester; he bowed and spread out his hands with a quaint gesture of welcome, and, to Anne's subtle apprehension, Feyghine, from being the master, seemed suddenly to become a guest, in this unreal house. And yet, as the Frenchman began speaking, in quickly hushed accents, addressing Paul at frequent intervals as "My Prince" and "Excellency," Anne realized that he was giving a long and rather apologetic account of how he had spent the interval since Feyghine had last seen him. He wound up with the rapidly uttered words, glancing as he spoke at the lady who, in spite of her powdered hair and quaint dress, looked so utterly unlike any woman who ever came to that house: "I have only laid covers for four, but I can easily arrange for the table to take two more, and then, with your leave, Excellency, I will seek repose. The nursing sister has been attended to by myself; I took up her dinner at seven, but she would not allow me even a glimpse of the child,—as if a sight of her devoted Achille could have hurt the little one! I fear she is not so well—she calls for your Excellency constantly. Concepcione declares that if the child had been left to her, she would now be in perfect health and running about. However, I have also kept the peace between the nursing sister and Concepcione."

In an odd shamed voice, Feyghine turned and asked his companion if she felt hungry. "Oh! no," said Anne, amazed, and then again, "oh! no, Paul, let us go on at once."

The colour had rushed into her face; was it possible that this feast had been prepared for her, and if not for her, then for whom? A strange, new feeling of

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misgiving oppressed Anne Leycester's heart; she had thought to come to a house of desolation, but now—now she began to feel afraid and mistrustful of her own power. They left the room and its odd inmate, and as Mrs. Leycester found herself again in the tower, walking up what seemed the interminable shallow stone steps of the winding stair, she felt as though virtue were going out of her; she was filled with a terrible sense of spiritual dryness.

Yet another thing added to Anne Leycester's feeling of uneasiness and oppression; Paul had become strangely unlike his usual dignified, taciturn self. As they went slowly up the tower he constantly turned and spoke to her, treating her as he might have done one whose sole business there was that of a sightseer. Each time that there came a break in the turning stone steps, that is as they rested a moment on the narrow landings, Paul uttered in quick, hissing accents whispered words of uncalled-for explanation: "On this side of the tower the rooms are small and low; the others, opposite, were evidently the apartments occupied by the successive important folk who, in the days when Islington was still separated from London by fields, came here to take the air! I wish you could see the place in the daytime, Anne; some of the carved panelling is still wonderfully perfect;" and again, "In the room to which I am taking you, I mean in Nicolette's nursery, there are two curious panels, 'Hope' and 'Faith,'"—he hesitated, and added in a lower, more natural tone: "I remembered them to-night, and felt comforted; they seemed symbolic, Anne, of your visit here."

They were there at last. Standing once more opposite a door set back in the thick wall of the tower Paul remained silently listening, and to Anne, standing by his side, there came the soft murmurs, the stuffless

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sounds denoting the nearness of a sick-room. Then, breaking across these, there burst on the stillness a fit of loud, unrestrained sobbing. Anne's uneasy fear suddenly left her; in a moment more she would be face to face with that common humanity which she understood, and with which she was in such true sympathy. Yet there also rose in her heart a feeling of fierce repugnance; from whom else but the sick child's mother could come that unrestrained, undisciplined grief? It would be Anne's part, her bitter penance, to see Paul and this poor woman linked together in that most sacred and enduring bond, a common grief and sense of coming loss.

But Feyghine, with an impatient gesture, turned to her, and whispered, "You hear the old nurse, Concepcione? That seems her only way of expressing her affection for the child! I shall have to try and get her to go downstairs—"

He suddenly put his hand on his cousin's arm, and, by the light of the small oil-lamp hanging above the door by which they stood, she saw that he had flushed a deep red. "I do not know what you do, Anne,—I mean when you go and see a sick child? The trained nurse is an odd woman, very experienced and all that sort of thing, but very averse to people going in and out of the room. Will it be necessary to tell her, I mean to explain to her why you have come?"

"No," said Anne in a low voice. "I do not think there will be any necessity to say anything to her about it. As to what I do"—she stopped, and hesitated painfully—"I kneel down and I—I pray, Paul. Surely the nurse can have no objection to that, and surely you also will pray with me?"

Feyghine shook his head. "No," he said, shortly, "To pray only when things are going ill is a scurvy thing to do! I should be ashamed, Anne! No, no,

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the best thing I can do, the only thing I can do to help you, is to get Concepcione out of the way."

Then, without knocking, he opened the door and walked straight into a large, strange, and to Anne's eyes, very beautiful room. The oak-panelled walls, gleaming darkly in the candlelight, were fantastically carved, the various designs forming an harmonious whole, though they were widely different, flowers and fruit alternating with the scallop-shell of the Crusaders, while here and there an inset coat-of-arms recalled the fact that this old tower and the appertaining building in which they now stood had once played a part in the history of various great English families.

As is so often the case with those apartments which survive untouched from medieval days, there lay off this large room a small closet-like chamber, of which the window evidently overlooked the garden side of the tower. This window was wide open to the sky, and as Anne followed Feyghine she saw that the door separating the two rooms had been removed, and through it, traversing the opening thus made, the moonlight drifted in, making a luminous patch on the dark floor. The window overlooking the square was heavily shuttered.

The right-hand further corner, that on which Anne's attention became at once fixed, was enclosed by brown holland screens, from behind which now issued the sounds of the Spanish woman's crying and moaning. In the left corner was an iron bed, on which lay carefully folded a long cloak and small bonnet. Close to the door through which Anne and Feyghine had just passed, were piled up on the floor, one on the top of the other, various nursery properties, including a number of those costly toys which to the average child people the fairyland of dreams. A bath—ugliest of modern sick-room necessaries—filled up the deep embrasure of the chimney, high above which stood the two carved oak

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figures of Hope and Faith, of which Feyghine had spoken to his cousin. Beneath these figures were inscribed the words: "FIDES VIA DEUS META" and "SPES CERTA SUPRA."

For this present arrangement of the room, it was clear that a shrewd, intelligent, not very refined-looking woman, clad in the dress of a trained nurse, was responsible. As the door opened, she had come forward with a slight frown on her face, and a finger laid to her lips, but a look of curiosity, of questioning surprise, became apparent when she saw by whom Feyghine was accompanied.

A nurse meets with many strange, and sometimes almost incredible, happenings in the course of her work, and during the last week, this woman had come across much that had surprised even herself, but now her face softened. In Paul Feyghine's companion she recognized a probable ally, and it was on Mrs. Leycester that her glance rested while she said in a loud whisper, "I'm so glad you've come back, sir. I wish you would persuade the old woman to go away, even for an hour! You hear the way she's going on? I'm obliged to let her sit close to the child's head, and it doesn't give the poor little thing a chance."

Feyghine nodded. "I'll take her downstairs," he said quickly, "and then, nurse, you can tell this lady,—Mrs. Leycester, this is Nurse Beach,—you can tell her, I say, of anything you may require. Mrs. Leycester knows a great deal about children and their illnesses."

He gave Anne a quick, pleading glance, and, as she bent her head, there came over her the feeling that this was yet another Paul Feyghine of whose existence she had been, till the last half-hour, ignorant. This Paul, who had always been so fearless, and whose submission to his mother was constantly streaked with sharp rebellion, evidently stood in awe of the capable, rather

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coarse-looking woman now in charge of the sick child; nay more, he was pathetically eager to conciliate her, and apparently afraid even to look at Nicolette unless she first vouchsafed permission.

"You would like to show this lady our little patient?" —Nurse Beach smiled at him indulgently. "Well, it can't do her any harm. She's asked for you a good many times, but the poor little thing isn't quite herself. At this stage, children, as well as grown-up people, are often delirious."

For a moment Feyghine looked fixedly at the nurse, as if he hardly understood what she was saying; then, very deliberately, he drew Anne behind the screens. Together they stood by Nicolette's crib-bed, silently looking down at the nameless child whose peril had sundered in a moment the impenetrable veils of reserve and secrecy enshrouding that half of Feyghine's life which was spent away from Anne Leycester and the world of which she formed a part.

The old Spanish nurse, sitting so close to the head of her nursling that her heaving breath fluttered the short dark hair on the child's forehead, suddenly stopped crying. She sat staring, fascinated, at the two figures, the amazing incongruity of whose fancy dress astounded her, distracting her from her grief. And, as they stood there in the deep silence, Mrs. Leycester, whose feelings rarely so found relief, felt her eyes fill with tears—tears of compassion for the man standing by her side, for she saw that the little creature stretched out before her was very ill and like to die.

Nicolette's attenuated figure lay in the rigidity so alien to childhood; her short straight hair gave her small head an ungirlish look, and her dark eyes, set in long narrow eyelids which lent peculiar character to her flushed face, moved restlessly in what appeared eager, anxious questioning. Now and again she said a word,

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a sentence, in what Anne took to be Spanish, and twice the word muttered was undoubtedly "Paul." But she seemed quite unaware of the two people standing by her cot, and Feyghine made no movement to touch her.

To Anne, there was something frightful in his silent, suppressed agony. "Won't you speak to her?" she whispered, "I think she said your name just now."

"She is worse, much worse, since I left here, a few hours ago! I ought to have come for you before—perhaps now it's too late?" There was a question in his hoarse, low voice, an appeal in the eyes which seemed to burn those into which his were gazing with so searching an inquiry.

He strode round to the back of the bed and touched the Spanish woman on the shoulder. She stood up, looked long at the child, and then, quite quietly, allowed herself to be led unresisting from the room whence no human being but Paul Feyghine had been able to move her during the last few days.

In the matter of the nurses who are, in these modern days, his auxiliaries, your great London doctor has a wide power of choice, and Sir Thomas Day had deliberately chosen Nurse Beach to take this particular case. On the whole he had made a good choice, but he would perhaps have sent a different type of human being had he known that she was to be brought in juxtaposition with such a woman as was Anne Leycester.

Now that Feyghine had gone, leaving Anne—or so he had believed—practically alone with the child, Nurse Beach felt that Mrs. Leycester was at her mercy, and she proceeded to make the most of her opportunity. It was clear to the nurse that this lady must be a near relation of the important foreigner of whom the great doctor seemed to think so much. In that case, Mrs. Leycester was surely one to whom Nurse Beach could

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pour out her feelings and sensations without demeaning herself. Accordingly, the moment the heavy oak-panelled door closed on Feyghine and the Spanish woman, she came behind the screens enfolding the sick child's bed, and began to talk in quick, eager undertones, uttering every word with a certain dramatic emphasis.

"As to what I require," she began, "well, madam, if you will excuse my saying so, *everything* is wanted here! I never saw a place so lacking in convenience of every sort. What I *do* ask for I do get, leastways when that gentleman who brought you is here." She hesitated, and looked inquisitively at Mrs. Leycester.

"But the servants—and they're all foreigners—live in quite another part of the house, the other side of the garden. There's no bath-room, no hot or cold water upstairs—nothing! I've never had such a case, never! You see these screens?"—even as she spoke, she was moving them aside with quick, vigorous hands. "Of course, the child ought to have all the air she can, but I just was forced to put them up. I should think I've had a matter of fifteen or twenty people, men and women—I can't call them ladies and gentleman—in to look at her to-day! As for the little girl's mother, I mean Señora Nuñez"—again Nurse Beach stopped for a moment, and glanced significantly at her silent listener,—"well, she was certainly very much upset at first,—she said the child's illness quite interfered with her dancing! But there! she went to see a fortune-teller—and since then she's felt quite happy!"

Nurse Beach sniffed scornfully and went on: "This fortune-teller—theatrical ladies go a lot to her, I believe—told her the little girl would certainly recover, and that she would be cured in some mysterious manner by an unknown person, who would come here twice, first bringing life, and then death,"—the nurse allowed herself a slight chuckle,—"so for the last two or three

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days, the Señora hasn't troubled much about us. Of course, the case is straightforward enough; it's been a matter of nursing right through, and now we've come to the crisis. It would have been better to have had two nurses, but I've done what I could."

"I'm sure you have," said Anne gently.

"I couldn't have managed at all if it hadn't been for the gentleman—I don't know his name"—she paused, but Mrs. Leycester did not gratify her curiosity. "He's been splendid, that I must say! You see, the child obeys him, and he's the only person, too, who can manage that old Spanish woman. You saw how he got her away—clever, wasn't it?"

"And now," said Anne at last, "is there nothing that can be done to help you to-night? Is there anything that I can get you?"

"No, nothing for the minute. Sir Thomas Day will be here in the morning. All we want now is quiet, and I don't suppose anyone will come in to-night to disturb us,—it's so late. The Señora was going on to a fancy dress affair—so perhaps she'll sleep in town. It's a long way from what I call London, is Islington!"

"In that case," said Mrs. Leycester, with a certain authority in her voice, "I should suggest your lying down, nurse, if only for an hour. I will keep watch by the child, and call you if it seems necessary. As you say, no one is likely to come now, and I am sure you must be very tired."

—Nurse Beach hesitated. She *was* very tired, oddly enough all the more tired since she had had the opportunity of "letting herself go" to one—a real lady this—who understood what a queer place they were in. So she assented to Anne's proposal, and, surrounding her bed with the screens which had been round Nicolette, she settled herself in for the first hours of real sleep she had enjoyed since she had taken over the "case."

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And so at last Anne found herself alone with the sick child whom Fate had brought so unexpectedly and so insistently into her life. Here, lying before her in this extremity, was her true rival, Paul Feyghine's strongest link with the life which sapped his energies and prevented his playing what should have been his rightful and natural part in his father's country—that country which stood then, even more than it does to-day, so greatly in need of men like himself.

And yet, as Anne Leycester slowly sank on to her knees, her whole soul went out in a passion of supplication that the child might live, and that Paul might be spared the anguish of loss which seemed so near. As she prayed, as she implored that her mysterious gift might now, if never more, quicken into being, a great weariness and a great serenity came on her together.

She was one of those human beings who only ask to be allowed to follow those they love into the furnace; and now she was in the midst of the burning, while even on her way hither she had been scorched by the flames of fierce, instinctive jealousy. But, in the presence of this little child, there were only pity and tenderness left in her heart, and as a mother, when offering up a prayer for one of her children, never forgets the claims of those others whom she has borne, so Anne Leycester, when offering up ardent, agonized prayers for Paul, never henceforth forgot to include Nicolette in her supplications.

* * * * *

Anne Leycester, still kneeling by Nicolette's bed, and wrapped, soul and body, in the mental and physical languor which she had learnt to associate with the successful termination of such a task as that which she had been essaying this night, saw a vision, or rather dreamt a dream which was of the nature of a vision.

At first, as so often occurs on a journey through

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dreamland, the happenings were of a most prosaic character. Anne dreamt that she suddenly opened her eyes to find that the candle-lit darkness had given way to the dim, white light afforded by the dawn which, flickering into the large panelled chamber through the window of the inner room or closet, traced faint pearly patches on the uneven oaken floor.

The screens were again round Nicolette's bed, and against their yellow greyness was outlined the robust figure of Nurse Beach. She was engaged in giving a spoonful of nourishment to the now sleepy child, and she was smiling the curious smile of impersonal satisfaction with which a good trained nurse notes any real improvement in her patient.

Anne Leycester was well aware that she only imagined this vividly real little scene, because the sight roused in her no desire to be up and doing,—no feeling that she had been remiss in her care of the child,—no demand on the part of her heart or brain that she should seek Paul Feyghine to tell him that Nicolette had passed the crisis, and was now on the way to recovery.

And then, even while she was thus debating with herself, there took place that which more than all else made it quite clear to the dreamer that her mind was moving amid unrealities; for suddenly, with the drifting in of the first mote-laden sunbeam, there glided through the heavy door, flung back by unseen hands, a small company of merry ghosts, who had quite evidently tripped down the ages, straight from taking part in some mediæval pageant.

The first of these elementals,—for so the unseen onlooker, peering fearfully round the edge of the screen nearest to herself, divined them to be,—was a beautiful youth, habited as the Knave of Hearts. In the days when he still walked the earth, this lad must have had his fancy caught by an Italian playing-card, for his

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costume was a bright, while yet harmonious, symphony of white and scarlet, green and gold, and it was completed by the traditional three-cornered cap. Below the cap, dark curls clustered, framing the top of the oval face, and repeating the colouring of the narrow, brightly glancing eyes; while the clear pallor of his rounded cheek emphasized the firm and exquisite modelling of the small scarlet mouth.

As he strutted gracefully in front of his less gainly companions, Anne saw that the slashings of the Knave's short satin cloak each formed a scarlet heart, while on his breast dangled another heart, a splendid gleaming jewel set with rubies; as he advanced with gliding steps towards the spot where she was kneeling, her gaze became concentrated on the gemmed heart, for there had come to her the knowledge that she had already seen this jewel, and, what was far more strange, seen it worn years ago, in Russia, by her aunt, Lettice Feyghine.

Then Mrs. Leycester, still crouching, fearfully, on the oaken floor, allowed her gaze to rest on the companions of this rather sinister-looking youth. While the Knave had advanced into the room, the two others had hung back, and they were now standing, sentinel-wise, one on each side of the open door giving access to the winding stairway in the tower.

On the right stood the King of Hearts, a short, broad, rather ungainly figure, with the pallid face, the sunken eyes, the red hair, with which mediæval painters always depicted Judas. The King of Hearts' eyes were rimmed with fatigue; he even looked—what Anne, till to-night, had never thought a ghost could look—both bored and sulky; a contrast indeed to his lanky *vis-à-vis*, who, tall, thin, and melancholy, must surely represent the Ace of Hearts, for he was dressed all in white, with one large heart emblazoned on his middle. The eyes, set in the long lean face, were clouded with sadness, and

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as he looked towards the place where he evidently knew the sick child to be lying behind the screens, an expression of very human distress and sympathy came over his countenance.

Quite suddenly Mrs. Leycester, in some subtle way, became aware that Nurse Beach was also conscious of these alien presences, and with dull surprise she noted that the sight angered rather than disturbed the nurse.

There was a pause,—and then, against the dark gleaming background formed by the panelled walls, there moved forward simultaneously the brilliant graceful figure of the Knave, and the thick-set figure of Nurse Beach, and so at last the two stood almost opposite, the one to the other, in the centre of the great room.

Still grimly silent, and looking at the sunlit intruder with almost savage disapproval, the nurse assumed such an air of solemnity that the Knave fell back, and half turning, flung out his little ringed hands to his two companions, giving, as he did so, a plaintive cry of pain; in response to that cry, the other fantastic forms hurried forward, and then stopped short—seeming reluctant or unwilling to interfere between these two who looked like combatants; and Anne felt her heart beat with vague apprehension.

Said Nurse Beach, very coldly: "You need not take on so—the little girl is better this morning."

The Knave's ivory-tinted face grew suddenly red with gusty anger, and his bright, narrow eyes shot out fire. "Then why did you frighten me by looking like that?" he exclaimed, imperiously: "and who—who is this?" and a shaking finger pointed at the kneeling figure which had now again retreated close to Nicolette's bedside.

Not till that moment did Anne Leycester, overwhelmed with a passion of quick jealousy and dismay, realize that the Knave of Hearts was no youth, no dream

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phantom floating out of the past into the present, but a young and beautiful woman. . . .

Shrinkingly eager to shut out the radiant figure which she now knew to be that of the woman for whom Paul had sacrificed so much, and who had given him the child he loved so well, Mrs. Leycester hid her face in her hands, while Nurse Beach, making no answer to the Knave's second question, went on as though she had not heard the interruption: "But the child won't remain better if people come in and out and disturb her like this—"

Anne Leycester, still kneeling by the little bed, heard the sharp words sharply uttered in the loud whisper she had come to associate with Nicolette's nurse, and then very slowly she raised her head, and, staring with fascinated eyes, she saw the motley vision fade—for the figure which she had taken for that of a ghost, but which she now knew to enclose a very human woman, groped its way through the sunlight to the place where the other two travestied figures had fallen back; swiftly they seized her hands and drew her away through the now wide open door, and so,—half supporting, half pushing her between them,—disappeared down the broad shallow winding stairway of the tower.

Fearing to move, lest she should provoke on the part of the nurse some coarse comment on the scene which had just taken place, Mrs. Leycester remained quite still till there occurred that which brought her back to the workaday world,—till Paul Feyghine stood by her side, gazing first at the child and then down at her, with an exultant expression of relief and gratitude on his worn, tired face.

Slowly, for she was still stiff with the long kneeling, Anne rose to her feet. The powder had shaken free of her fair hair, the lace coif had fallen back, and Nurse Beach, looking with avid curiosity from the one to the

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other, realized that the woman with whom she had spent the last few hours was still young,—far younger, for instance, than herself; and further, that the relationship of this mysterious lady to the scarcely less mysterious Paul Feyghine was not that of a sister to a brother.

But Anne Leycester, for a moment, forgot the existence of Nurse Beach; she felt herself to be alone with Feyghine and with the child.

After they had been standing next to one another for what seemed to be a long time, Paul suddenly spoke: "Anne," he said, gently, "are you ready? I'm going to take you home."

She bowed her head and then, with her right hand, touched lightly that of the now sleeping Nicolette; and Feyghine, bending down, placed his hand over the fingers of the woman and the child,—and with his touch, Anne Leycester became aware that the experience she had gone through had had on her soul the effect of a bruise, and of a bruise that she must conceal at all costs from the man by whom she was now standing.

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PART II

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CHAPTER IX

Have I not seen thee? Yea, but where and when?
Ah! I remember—I was dreaming then.

THE costume dances which had been advertised as the leading attraction of the fête now being held in the gardens of Hague House were just over, and Francis Domville was free to spend the time that must elapse before he finally sought out the rest of his party, in the fashion that best pleased him.

Fancy dress has a curious effect on those of its wearers dowered with heart and imagination, and often the clothes so far make the man as to let loose a second and habitually hidden self. To-night, Francis Domville, transformed for the nonce into Axel Fersen, most tragic and heroic of the world's great lovers, felt singularly out of touch with all that was going on about him. At no time,—not even as a very young man ardent in the pursuit of every kind of excitement and pleasure,—had he been among those revellers to whom noise and movement make for happiness.

A longing for silence and for solitude suddenly possessed him, and, shaking himself free from the animated laughing crowd about him, he left that portion of the gardens where the dances had taken place, and struck off alone into the moonlit darkness where each of the spacious glades and spreading lawns, bounded by formal gardens enclosed in rose and jasmine-wreathed pergolas,

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offered a series of mysterious and enchanting vistas to a solitary saunterer.

An artist financially interested in electric light, had placed the resources of his firm at the disposal of the Hague House Fête Committee; and so, to the natural loveliness of the scenes through which Domville was making his way, were added strange artificial beauties, miracles of colour which gradually filled his mind and senses with delight, for his was one of those natures on whom beauty of environment has an exalting, almost an exciting, effect.

At last he came on a line of arches draped in ivy, and terminating in a square pavilion, of which the domed roof was darkly outlined against the star-powdered sky. There he stayed his steps, and, as he leaned with crossed arms on the stone rim of one of the ivied arches, there drifted into his mind unprofitable thoughts concerning his past life and his apparently drab future.

Fate, in the person of Miss Hassal, had played Domville a scurvy trick. He had made what had been to a man of his temperament a rather unworthy attempt to lure good fortune to his side, but the arts of which Nature is so prodigal to the intuitive and masterful lover had failed,—and failed just as he had begun to feel the fascination of the chase. He now told himself, with a certain vehemence, that his object had not been wholly ignoble,—that he had not simply sought to secure the material luxury and pleasures that money can alone buy. His had been surely a nobler aim—that of securing Gaynesford both for himself and for those who were to come after him. And yet, to-night, Domville felt, mingled with the shame of having failed in that which, in the case of another man, he would have crudely described as an heiress-hunting adventure, a feeling of relief that Rose Hassal would never reign as mistress over Gaynesford.

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Gaynesford? Standing there in this enchanted and enchanting garden, Francis Domville thought painfully of the place to which he felt more closely linked than he did to any human being. He had that very day received a largely increased offer from the foreigner, an Austrian lady named Baroness Karff, for whom the peculiar charm of the austere old house seemed to possess an irresistible fascination. He could ill afford to throw away the considerable sum this person was prepared to pay for a few weeks' tenancy of the place, and yet he felt singularly tempted to do so, for of late he had longed to spend there a period of solitude and self-examination.

At Gaynesford, so Domville had told himself during the last fortnight, he would be able to think out his present and future in a way that was impossible in the London existence so closely allied to that of his cousin, Paul Feyghine. The time had come when he must re-shape his life, so far as that is ever possible to a man who is nearer forty than thirty. But in no circumstances—so to-night he fiercely determined with himself—would he look to marriage to restore his fortunes or to help him to a career. Nay more, he would batten down henceforth, hold tight in leash, that craving for sentimental adventure—always dignified by him with the name of love—which had often deviated the course of his life, and of which nothing now survived save a few acrid-sweet memories.

So shaken and humbled had Domville become, owing to the inglorious ending of what had been at once the most innocent and the least alluring of his sentimental episodes, that to-night he almost felt inclined to envy Paul Feyghine his long fidelity to a woman who had proved herself incapable of constancy. Feyghine owed to Joaquina the dancer a whole gamut of emotions, to which Domville was yet a stranger,—passion of an exalted,

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almost mystical, quality; pride, selfless and absorbing, in the achievements of the beloved, for Joaquina was a great artist; jealousy, that emotion so closely allied to love that in many natures it keeps alive and even re-awakens the first fervours of passion. All this and more had the dancer brought Paul Feyghine. "Qu'importe le flacon, pourvu qu'on ait l'ivresse!"—ignoble and cynical words, yet capable of a high, as well as of a base, interpretation.

Suddenly there broke on the still air a woman's voice, attuned, — or so it seemed to the surprised listener,—to a disdainful scorn of all that was going on in that portion of the gardens where were being celebrated the rites of the great War Orphans Entertainment.

"Pray go forth and see all that there is to be seen. Indeed, I entreat you to do so, my dear Cooey! I am well guarded here, both by stout walls and my own thoughts. Adventures, so the English say, are to the adventurous, and I am in no mood for an adventure—" There was a pause,—then the voice, instinct with impatient pain and anger, broke out again: "You thought to please me,—to distract me,—by bringing me here, but you were wrong, Cooey! I am no longer a child to be amused by such things; I am a woman, aged by treachery." So ran the words, uttered in stilted and yet pathetic language, and by one, as Domville at once realized, to whom the tongue she was using in so dramatic a fashion was foreign.

Each word had been spoken, or so it seemed to the eavesdropper, within a few feet of where he stood. A moment before, he had felt the artificial brilliance and bright lights about him almost oppressive; now he became aware of the mysterious depths of the shadows encompassing the ivied arch wherein he stood

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—instinctively he threw away the cigarette he was smoking.

A feeling of intense curiosity,—a sudden, intolerable longing to make closer acquaintance with the owner of the peculiar, bell-like voice, began to possess Francis Domville. He remained quite still, but there came no further sound out of the darkness; the invisible speaker and the companion to whom she had addressed her singular words must have been moving, even as she spoke, swiftly and silently down some hidden path close to where he was standing. And yet he lingered, straining his eyes into tantalizing vistas of shifting light and shadow, while yet upbraiding himself for a fool.

At last he moved abruptly away; he turned and soon found himself wandering once more in the moonlit maze of what appeared to be a wild garden,—though, even here, art had come to enhance and emphasize the simpler appeal of delicate scent and colour.

At the end of a path edged with flowering sweetbriar, he came rather suddenly on a broad pergola terminating in a pavilion, which he realized with unreasoning surprise was the building to which he had been so close only a few moments before, and which he saw was connected with Hague House by a long conservatory-like passage. He walked slowly on, and having paced the whole length of the pergola, he found himself opposite a glazed door through which he gazed with surprised and delighted eyes—

The owners of Hague House had interpreted in magnificent fashion the duties of hospitality to the strangers gathered to-night within their gates; for the large domed apartment which lay on the other side of the glass door had evidently been arranged to provide a resting-place for those weary of the revels of which, even here, could be heard the discordant echoes. Certain rare pieces of fine old furniture, panels of tapestry which the onlooker

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recognized as having an historic significance, a high Chinese screen, which generally stood in the dining-room of Hague House—these, and more, had been brought to grace, apparently for a few hours only, this solitary pavilion. On a marble console, turned for the nonce into a miniature buffet, was arranged what the most famous of the châtelaines of Hague House would have termed a collation,—but surely here the laws of hospitality had been interpreted with a quixotic lack of measure, for the china cabinets and the plate chests of the memoried old house had been rifled of their choicest, rather than of their showiest, contents, and these left unguarded from that most adroit of modern thieves, the unscrupulous collector.

And yet, as Domville, still standing outside the glass-panelled door, saw with true appreciation, the beautiful furnishings of the pavilion into which he was gazing, had no look of having been brought together in hurried or inharmonious fashion. Here no electric light threw a too searching gleam on faded tapestry and old embroidery,or lighted up the warmer tints of the Aubusson carpet, which his fastidious taste pointed out as oddly unsuited to the floor of a garden room. On the high marble mantelpiece, opposite the door behind which he was concealed, stood a torch-like lamp, of which the crystal column was reflected in the sheet of glass which in the daytime must make the pavilion seem a part of the Dutch garden. A lamp also obviously stood behind the Chinese screen, of which the outspread leaves concealed one portion of the room.

Domville felt at once glad and sorry that so far no one appeared to have profited by what had been arranged with such kindly and hospitable intent; and yet, even while gazing with a feeling of fascinated attraction into tbe apparently solitary pavilion, he hesitated to turn the handle of the door. Then, suddenly, he became aware

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of what in the half-darkness he had not before realized, namely, that the door through which he was looking was slightly ajar; slowly he pushed it wide open, and, advancing with hesitating, noiseless steps, looked with interest and curiosity about him—

The upper half of one of the long narrow windows which, alternating with trellis-covered spaces, formed the outer wall of the garden room, was wide open, and, as he leant out for a moment, Domville saw, as if spread out upon a stage before him, the brilliantly illuminated stretch of sward, where the great crowd hung together like bees swarming. But, though he could distinguish the moving figures swaying to and fro, and even hear the murmur of their voices mingling with the strains of music, he felt them to be infinitely remote from the spot where he now found himself.

Then, turning away from the open window, he became gradually aware that, with a few exceptions, everything about him had been chosen to recall, not only a certain period of art, but a certain feminine personality. On three of the smaller pieces of furniture were interlaced the initials M and A, surmounted by the Austrian eagle. Especially was his attention arrested by a work-table, which, as he well knew, had only been lately added to the Hague House collection,—the fantastic price paid in a London sale-room for this comparatively simple and rather shabby little relic of the last Queen of France, had whirled it into the light gossip of the hour. Poor Marie Antoinette! Poor "petite reine de vingt ans"! During that far-off summer spent by Feyghine and himself near Versailles, Domville had been at some pains to re-constitute and make alive to himself her enigmatic character, and, above all, to ascertain the truth concerning her relation to Count Fersen.

Now, to-night, standing in the midst of these things which had once surrounded her, he wondered if Axel

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Fersen's loyal heart had ever really beaten under the embroidered waistcoat he was wearing—the waistcoat which had been the principal treasure of the hoards gathered together by a Versailles antiquary. And then Domville looked down with a sudden feeling of shame,—shame to be thus masquerading in the very clothes of the man who had known, not only to preserve safe from prying eyes and ears the secret of the woman he loved, but to make his own love appear, and that to those of his contemporaries who composed the most cynical society Christendom has ever known, singularly pure and selfless. . . .

With mind and heart still steeped in thoughts of the long dead actors in that poignant drama, Domville suddenly saw, with quick, almost incredulous amazement, that he was not alone—and, what was stranger far, that he shared the pavilion with one who at least had as much right to be there as himself.

By a round table on which stood the lamp the presence of which he had divined, there sat, behind the high enveloping Chinese screen, the immobile figure of a woman who, if he to-night renewed the personality of Axel Fersen, might even more claim to have brought back to earth the physical semblance of the young Marie Antoinette—

She was bending over a large volume in which were pasted autograph letters, and her head and bust were framed, but in no way concealed, by the gilt arch of one of those hooded chairs known to collectors of eighteenth-century furniture as bergères.

Through her lightly-powdered hair—dressed not high, as in the more conventional portraits of Marie Antoinette, but drawn loosely off the face, as in the earlier presentments of the Queen as Dauphine—was threaded a blue ribbon, repeating the colour of the simple silk gown of

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which the only trimming consisted of innumerable eyelet-holes bound with tarnished silver thread. In addition, a grey and white muslin scarf outlining the shoulders and bust, was caught together on the breast with a pearl-rimmed miniature. Domville's glance,—his direct and yet not overbold glance,—travelled from the oval face, innocent of any touch of rouge or pearl-powder, to the slender dimpled hand, which, with no bracelet to spoil the symmetry of the wrist and tapering fingers, supported one side of the heavy folio.

At last she came to the end of the page and, turning it, looked up to discover—with far more reason for amazement than Domville — that the pavilion held another inmate—

And then, as her blue, heavy-lidded eyes rested intently on the tall figure of the man before her, as she swiftly noted every detail of the costume he was wearing, a look in which resentment and curiosity strove for mastery came over her face; and there then fell on Domville's ears, there then knocked at the door of his heart, accents which at once recalled those which had so aroused his curiosity half an hour before; but the voice, which had then been high and clear, tuned to a certain passionate revolt, was now low and uncertain—

"Who are you?"—she asked, "and why are you here?" as she spoke, the hand which had been holding the book travelled to her breast and concealed the small pearl-rimmed miniature which held together the grey and white scarf.

Domville came a few steps nearer; he stood by the high screen, the table only between them, and looked down into her upturned face—"If you, to-night, are the Queen," he answered rather hoarsely, "then I to-night am Axel Fersen! What more natural than that we should meet, even in this place,—not an ill substitute, to me at least, for the Elysian Fields?"

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She rose, pushing back the heavy gilt chair with a swift gesture, and stood opposite to him, showing that she was taller and slighter than he had at first taken her to be; he noted that her mouth—to Domville always the dominating feature in a woman's countenance—was beautiful, and redeemed the rather heavy character of the lower half of her jaw.

"I was promised," she said, rather coldly, and yet there was that in her wide open eyes which seemed half to pardon the stranger's audacity, "that none should know that I was here to-night—"

"—No one has betrayed you," he cried eagerly, "believe me, our meeting is as much an accident as such happenings ever are."

"Then pray, sir, why that name—why that costume?" and though she reddened deeply she spoke collectedly, as one who has a right to an explanation.

"If we are to speak frankly," he answered, "I have as much right to wear this costume, and to call myself Axel Fersen, as you yourself, madam, have the right to personate Marie Antoinette."

She looked at him doubtfully, as if weighing his words; then, with apparent irrelevance, she exclaimed, "Is it possible that you are the great-nephew of Count Fersen? In that case,"— she spoke with sudden ease and happy vivacity,—"my visit to England seems likely to give me a great and longed-for pleasure! Some years ago, when I had thought to go to Sweden, we corresponded, you and I; indeed, as you see, I am even now actually wearing your gift!"—with a sudden movement she unfastened, and held out across the table, the miniature her hand had concealed; and Domville saw with amazement that it was a reduced facsimile of that contemporary portrait of Fersen which had confirmed his belief in the authenticity of the uniform bought by him years before from the Versailles curiosity-monger.

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"You are mistaken"—Domville instinctively stepped back, unwilling to accept her graciousness on so false a pretext: "I am in no sense related to Axel Fersen. Indeed, we seem to be playing at cross-purposes, for our meeting to-night has been wholly fortuitous. I do not know—I will not say I do not care—who you were yesterday, and who you will be to-morrow, but to-night let me believe we are whom we appear to be; and remember,"—he spoke with a sudden gravity,—"remember that respect was a dominating feeling in Fersen's devotion to the Queen."

"Ah, yes!" she exclaimed, "that is rightly said!" Then she paused, and for the first time since she had seen the man who embodied,—far more than there was any danger of his suspecting,—her own ideal of romance, a touch of very delicate coquetry came into her voice as she added, "But I'm told that men do not love so nowadays. And if I am, in very truth, to take you to-night for Fersen's ghost, then on your honour tell me if you remained ever faithful to the Queen? Or did you in secret claim the right modern man apparently arrogates to himself—that of enjoying various kinds of love?" and the glance with which she winged the curious and not very maidenly question was at once an appeal and a confession.

Her eyes were beautiful,—larger and more intensely blue than those of the Queen whom she otherwise so strangely resembled,—and now they rested on Domville with a troubled and yet confiding gaze, which stirred him to tenderness, and seemed to tell him that she lacked the knowledge of life, and even more, the knowledge of men, her words implied.

And yet—yet he felt as if a shadowy third had suddenly thrust himself between them, and the intrusion both moved and angered him. "You wrong me," he said coldly,—"and even in a sense the modern lover,—by such

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a doubt. At no time had Axel Fersen a thought save for the Queen. More often than they know, women determine the quality of the love bestowed on them, and you may believe me when I say that the devotion Fersen lavished on Marie Antoinette is even now the best refutation of what was said by the enemies of the last Queen of France."

Domville spoke with a fire of conviction, a sincerity of utterance, which surprised himself. He added after a long pause, and in a very different tone: "The modern man does not often meet a woman who compels fidelity."

"And when he meets her," she exclaimed, "he may be blind and pass her by,"—again Domville felt the masterful presence of an unseen and treacherous intruder, and once more there swept over him a feeling of jealous, unreasoning anger.

Twice he opened his lips, and then found that he feared to speak. He felt as though he had gone back a long way on the road of life,—as though age, that phantom which had been about to tap him on the shoulder, was now hurrying forward out of sight. But with this return to youth, and all youth's longing for and indomitable belief in romance, came forgotten timidities and delicate scruples. While he was speaking for Fersen his words had come easily, but now no words would come—

Suddenly the lovely stranger turned and walked swiftly across the great square room towards the open window. Domville hesitated a moment, and then followed her—

—Side by side they looked out into the night, and there fell on them a silence pregnant with a feeling,—an atmosphere which, even if partly emanating from herself, caused the woman to recoil; for Domville's companion was one of those to whom love had come to be regarded

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in the guise of an enemy with whom much parleying must take place before he is made free of the fortress. Others there are,—and Domville and his cousin Paul Feyghine were among those others,—with whom love, whether he comes in great or in lowly guise, leaps at once into his own, being admitted, often with far too little question, into the innermost chamber of that stronghold men and women have elected to call the heart.

Desiring to break the spell this strange encounter had placed upon her, it was she who at last ended the long silence. For the first time she smiled: "I see," she said, "that you have as true a cult for the memory of Marie Antoinette as I for that of Count Fersen. When I first saw you,—and admit I had a right to be surprised,—when I first saw you, I say, I realized at once whom you purported to be, and my heart cried sacrilege! But then perhaps yours did the same?"

"Nay, for you embodied, as no woman has ever done before, my ideal of the Queen,"—Domville's eager, entranced eyes spoke far more eloquently than his lips; and he went on earnestly, "You must surely be aware —it is impossible that you do not know—of your amazing likeness to Marie Antoinette's early portraits?"

"I have been told so," she said simply. And then, when again the silence became to her oppressive, and fraught with an atmosphere which at once repelled and attracted her, she added, very gently, "And now our little comedy must end! The friend with whom I came to Hague House will be returning to fetch me away, and I should prefer that she should not find you here." She hesitated, then held out her hand as if she was unaccustomed to the gesture: "As an Austrian, it pleases me to know that there is an Englishman who thinks with such reverence of Marie Antoinette, and

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who, if only in that sense, has made Count Fersen live again."

Domville disregarded the outstretched hand: "Surely," he said, "you cannot mean that we are not to meet again?"—and in his measured voice there was a note of such revolt that it woke a surprised, insistent echo in her heart. "Only tell me your name, and that of one of your English friends, and I shall so arrange our next meeting that the most scrupulous, the most conventional could not but approve."

"What you propose is impossible,"—and yet there was hesitation—nay more, something of wavering indecision, in her voice. "In a few days I shall be far from London"; and the slender hand she had held out retreated to her side.

"Not so far," he cried quickly, "but that I can follow. I am that rather melancholy thing, a free man. Let me use my freedom in making us better acquainted. Tell me where you are going, where I may hope to follow you?"

"But I do not yet know where I shall be; the place is not yet certain—"

"Only tell me," he said urgently, "the name of the uncertain place,"—and he was unaware of the odd collocation of his words.

"The name of the uncertain place?" she repeated, and then she looked doubtingly at the man standing by her side; his face was pale and set in stern lines, his eyes seemed at once to entreat compassion and to compel submission to his wish. Suddenly she yielded, and as she was about to speak, her hand—the hand Domville had disdained to touch in formal parting—sought the lintel of the window, and grasped it with a nervous movement. "The name of the place to which I am going is Gaynesford,"—she uttered the name very distinctly.

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"Gaynesford? Then I shall look to meeting you at Gaynesford." Suppressed triumph,—eager incredulous delight,—breathed in every tone of the studiously quiet voice.

There came a sound of quick, heavy steps hurrying through the pergola towards the door of the pavilion; Domville heard them first, and putting his right hand on the broad sill of the window he vaulted over, and so became engulfed in the scented darkness below.

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CHAPTER X

C'est cette moitié de soi-même qu'on cherche toujours qui fait faire tant d'extravagances.

FRANCIS DOMVILLE spent the rest of that night in a strange, unreasoning mood of suspense and exultation. He told himself, with amazed rapture, that never before had he been so subjugated, so entranced,—and that by some spiritual quality, some subtle charm, which made a powerful appeal to his soul as well as to his senses. The thought of his late companion and himself at Gaynesford, together, filled him with delight, and with a longing almost painful in its intensity.

He also felt devoured by a curiosity which he determined should be satisfied at the first possible moment. The lady of the pavilion was undoubtedly the Baroness Karff, whose offer for Gaynesford he had been on the point of refusing; so much seemed certain, but he asked himself uneasily what were the circumstances of her life? There had been no rings on her beautiful hands, but that with a foreign woman was, as he well knew, no indication of either a married or a single state.

Almost for the first time in his life Domville felt himself at fault. There had been in her manner, even in her speech, an ease and directness which forbade the notion that she was a girl en pouvoir de mère—the daughter, for instance, of the Austrian lady who had shown so eager a determination to spend some weeks at Gaynesford. No, no, this without doubt was the Baroness Karff herself; and Domville, wandering about

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in search of Mary Wratten, imagined a set of circumstances which would fit in as none other would do with his secret desire. He told himself that the lady with whom he had just enjoyed so romantic a meeting was a widow; that her married life had been brief, her husband a man whom she had found unworthy even of that measure of idealizing affection which he knew the foreign girl so often bestows on an unknown bridegroom.

Romance and the spirit of adventure are kinder to their votaries than the unromantic and timorous are inclined to believe; that he should thus have met the woman he was now convinced was the Baroness Karff in so strange a fashion, and in so unexpected a guise, was accepted by Domville as a proof that fortune was once more prepared to smile on him.

His change of mood became very apparent to Miss Wratten during their long drive back to Sanctuary House. With quick intuition she felt that something had occurred during the last few hours to alter, not only her companion's state of mind, but his attitude to herself. Pleading special urgency, he stopped to telegraph to the solicitors with whom the negotiations as to the letting of his country house had been carried on, and, when again taking his place by Mary's side, "I have made up my mind," he observed, "to accept the offer made to me for Gaynesford; it would be folly to reject it,"—and as he spoke, his face grew grave, for he had been near, perilously near, to committing that folly. "Still, that need make no difference as to the Russian doctor in whom you and Anne are interested. To-morrow, or rather this morning, I will write to Father Copley and ask him to put me up at the presbytery for a few days, and at the same time I will ask him if he can take in Dr. Mitroff; by what Anne tells me, there might be trouble in getting the poor fellow to go alone."

"That," said Mary, hesitatingly, "is really good of

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you. I don't think we could ever persuade him to go off by himself. After all, well as he speaks English, he's a foreigner, poor man, and must feel very strange here. But you won't find him an agreeable third. He has a real distaste for every form of religion, joined to the Russian hatred—you know even Madame Feyghine has it—of the Catholic Church."

"Oh, well, he will find it hard to make himself unpleasant to Father Copley; and then they'll have one interest in common—they both write. Didn't Anne tell me that Mitroff is now engaged on some kind of book dealing with English life?"

"Yes," said Mary, rather drily; "—England as seen from a London cellar."

But Dr. Mitroff was now seeing life from a very different standpoint; and, as the hansom drove up to Sanctuary House, Miss Wratten, had she lifted up her eyes, might have seen the pale face and emaciated figure of the man who inspired her with a mixture of dislike and pity, watching with eager, curious eyes her own and Domville's return from the War Orphans Entertainment.

Still filled with restless, unreasoning gladness and excitement, Domville walked back from Westminster across St. James's Park, enjoying the unwonted spectacle of the solitary streets and deserted paths, to the rooms which he shared with his cousin, Paul Feyghine.

After he had exchanged the fancy dress which had played so important a part in his romantic adventure for the less becoming garments of everyday life, he wrote his letter to Father Copley, and once more went out, preferring to spend in the open air the time that must elapse till the hour when it might be supposed that the solicitors who had charge of his affairs would have arrived at their office and be ready to see him.

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He had not far to go, for the ancient and honoured firm of Joseph Plumbe and Co. had their offices in Half Moon Street, Piccadilly, in a massive old house where their forebears had doubtless established themselves at a time when their religion formed an intangible bar to their mixing with their own legal kind. Even now the two men, father and son, who composed the firm, had very little in common with their brethren of Lincoln's Inn Fields and Bedford Row. Seldom, indeed, had either partner occasion to go east of Charing Cross; their life-work consisted entirely of such profitable and respectable transactions as the drawing up of wills, the making of marriage settlements, and the carrying on of considerable land agencies for the Catholic nobility and gentry.

Even more profitable was that branch of their business which brought Francis Domville, as it had brought his father before him, so often to Half Moon Street; for that consisted in the raising of money on mortgage for such of their clients to whom the modern world offers pleasures and temptations which were wholly out of reach of their persecuted ancestors. Yet, even as regarded this matter, Messrs. Plumbe were unlike many of their legal brethren. They honestly deprecated, and would willingly have forfeited, this class of business; and, as Francis Domville had only too good reason to know, the senior partner considered himself entitled to accompany formal transactions of the kind with a homily on the danger and unwisdom of borrowing money at even so reasonable a rate of interest as four and a half per cent. Mr. Plumbe was the more justified in assuming a paternal manner towards his younger clients because he also belonged to a family noted in the penal annals of the Catholic Church for its loyalty and its sufferings. Nay more, the Plumbes had occasionally married into the circle a witty writer has

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dubbed "The Cousins," and two ancestors of the present head of the firm had suffered for their faith at Tyburn, having been hanged, drawn, and quartered in the days of good Queen Bess.

Francis Domville and the younger Joseph Plumbe had been for some four years together at Stonyhurst, and each felt for the other that kindness, not wholly free from contempt, which seems so often to mark school-fellowship. From the younger Joseph, so Domville promised himself, he would soon learn all he wished to know concerning the Baroness Karff, and that without revealing that there was any special reason for his questions.

As he left the Green Park, and when he was about to cross over to Half Moon Street, there suddenly passed by—giving an unwonted sense of movement and human interest to the still deserted thoroughfare—a brougham which Domville recognized as being that of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. He stopped and took off his hat, and for a moment the piercing eyes of the aged Churchman met his with a keen glance of recognition.

Each was disturbed, even rather moved, by the unexpected interchange of glance. Domville felt for the Cardinal as he did for no other man, a mixture of reverence and fear. The peculiar caste to which he belonged by birth, and by a thousand intimate associations connected mostly with his early youth, has no love, and above all no understanding, of the modern English convert; and that one of these should have been chosen to be head of the Catholic Church in England had been a painful shock to the world wherein the Domvilles of Gaynesford held an exalted place.

And yet there had been a moment when Francis Domville had been brought very near to the Archbishop; in him the great Churchman had even thought for a moment to find that Catholic Englishman destined to

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play a real part in the modern history of his country. But the Cardinal had not allowed for two potent factors in the personal history of all those human beings who are, in the foreign sense of the word, "born." These factors are environment, and the prejudices excited by carefully fostered hereditary instincts. Genius of a peculiar quality can alone combat these with any measure of success, and Francis Domville was lacking in that rarest of human attributes. His sister, had she been a man, might more readily have shown herself possessed of it. So it was that a veil gradually fell between the even then old man and the youth, and, as the years went on, they never met save on the very few ceremonial occasions when the Archbishop was drawn, never willingly, into the social life of those old Catholic families who still led an existence utterly remote from, and indifferent to, the seething world of to-day.

When Domville reached the solicitors' office, neither father nor son had as yet arrived, but he was shown straight into the head partner's room, there to find,—the first thing which caught his eye,—his own telegram lying on the top of a pile of letters on the solicitor's table. He began to pace up and down the long room, and a feeling of misgiving came over him; he told himself uneasily that perhaps he was a fool, and what was worse a romantic fool, to do what he was now doing.

In spite of the dramas of which a solicitor's office is necessarily the theatre, there is something toneless, arid, and disenchanting in the atmosphere of a successful lawyer's room; and, as Francis Domville walked restlessly up and down, he reminded himself that his associations with this place were all unpleasant, even painful Why, the very last time he had been here it had been in the company of a distant kinsman of his own, a man named Edmund Wake, who only a few years back had

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still counted as among the greatest of north-country Catholics, in order to help him through the last hours of the final disentanglement of his affairs.

The recollection was disturbing. Domville pictured the surprise with which the Plumbes both father and son, would learn that they owed his visit to anything but a desire to raise more money on the already heavily mortgaged Gaynesford. And yet, so the young man now argued with himself, he had not, even in his most careless days, been tempted to indulge in the senseless extravagance of such a man as had been, for instance, his contemporary and cousin, Edmund Wake. The letting of his house for a few weeks to this foreign lady would certainly appear to the Plumbes only another device for the raising of a little ready-money. For the first time, the thought of his coming business relation to the woman who had made so powerful an impression on his heart and on his imagination filled Domville with dismay. At any rate, she should not be allowed to pay more than the market price for the tenancy of the old house which, still magnificent without, had been suffered to fall into something akin to ruin within.

So it was that, when at last the two men Domville had been awaiting came in, their client very soon confirmed what they took to be their knowledge of his unreasonable and quixotic character.

Not so, however, at first. "I have come to tell you," he said abruptly, "that I've made up my mind to let Gaynesford to that lady—to the Baroness Karff."

"I hope you will be willing in that case," observed the old solicitor drily, "to devote a certain portion of the fancy rent she is prepared to pay to making the house fit for future tenants."

"That's what brought me here. I don't think its fair to allow her to pay such an absurd sum, especially if she hasn't been down herself to Gaynesford and seen the

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state it's in. If she really wishes to go there this week, there won't be time to make it more habitable. I hope you've told her," he added, "that there are no modern luxuries—that the house has been practically untouched for over twenty years."

"You needn't feel any scruple as to the amount she is going to pay for the six weeks' tenancy," observed the lawyer smiling, "for the good woman seems made of money!"

Domville looked at the old man with a faint feeling of disgust. "Who and what is the Baroness Karff?" he asked shortly, and as he spoke it seemed to him that his voice altered,—cried the truth aloud,—bade the solicitor be careful how he answered. But old Mr. Plumbe's eyes were very much holden: "We have had the most excellent references," he said briskly; "in fact the whole of the negotiations have taken place through Coutts' Bank. The Baroness Karff is apparently a client of theirs, and what is more, a highly valued client. It is they who have increased, almost day by day, the first offer made by her."

"Then you have never seen her?" There was relief, as well as disappointment, in Domville's voice.

"Oh! yes, we've seen her. She's been here more than once,"—and both father and son looked at one another, and smiled as if at some absurd recollection. "She seemed to think that, if she could only see you, she would certainly persuade you to give way, but of course we told her that a personal interview was out of the question."

Domville felt suddenly angered,—it seemed to him as if a coarse finger were being laid on something delicate, gossamer, something which he already felt very near to himself.

"We both had the impression," broke in the younger man, "that she had some particular reason for wishing

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to go to Gaynesford, and that she had known, if not yourself, then certain members of your family, notably your father,"—the speaker looked significantly at the man whom he was addressing, and avoided his own father's glance of surprised reproof.

"But that's impossible!" cried Domville. "She's much too young, and I doubt if she's ever been in England before."

"Young?"—his old schoolfellow stared at him curiously. "Why, my dear Francis Domville, the Baroness Karff must be well over fifty, and to my mind she's undoubtedly English, though she doesn't admit it. In fact, I shouldn't mind laying a considerable sum that your future tenant is one of those happy people who are enjoying, in the evening of their days, the glory of a papal title! Depend upon it, she made her pile abroad in some respectable fashion, and then offered herself the luxury of a barony. After all, why shouldn't she?"

A horrible fear had come over Domville. Was it conceivable that his ears had played him false,—that some other name than that of Gaynesford had been uttered by the woman already enshrined in his memory? What could she have in common with the elderly lady who had produced so odd, so grotesque, an impression on the two men with whom he was now speaking?

"Such things are not unknown, even in this country," observed the old solicitor with a dry chuckle. Then, more seriously, he added: "In any case, it might be worth your while to make the Baroness Karff's acquaintance. Why not run down to Gaynesford presently, and see her?"

"By the way, perhaps we ought to tell you that she is not alone,"—Joseph Plumbe junior spoke with a certain elaborate carelessness, turning over some papers on the table as he did so. There was a side of Francis Domville which had always interested him and piqued

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his curiosity. He had heard something of the Rose Hassal affair, and, like Madame Feyghine, the young solicitor had been naively surprised that any girl could reject the chance of becoming Mrs. Domville of Gaynesford. He went on, looking up as he did so into Francis Domville's inscrutable face: "She has some one with her, a Catholic like herself, to whom she is acting as guardian—in fact, she is apparently taking the place because this other lady has been ill and is in need of a thorough change and rest."

"Oh, so she's not alone?" repeated Domville slowly; there was relief, almost joy, in his voice, for he felt that now he was within sight of the true explanation, namely that the woman whom he had met the night before was not the Baroness Karff but the Baroness Karff's ward. "Do you know the other lady's name?" he looked earnestly at the two men before him."

"Yes, we've got it somewhere—you've the letters there, father?"

Mr. Plumbe reluctantly opened a drawer in his writing-table; and, as he did so, he looked rather crossly at his son. The morning was getting on, and there was a great deal of work to be done. But the other did not catch or affected to ignore the look, and so the older man resigned himself to the waste of time. "Here's the letter," then he read out the words, "'My friend, the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg.' I'm very glad you've made up your mind to accept their offer, Mr. Domville, and if I were you I should certainly go down and see the Baroness——" he hesitated, then shut his lips as if determining to say no more.

"—She's really quite worth seeing, and she certainly spoke of your father in a sense that showed a considerable knowledge of your family," added the younger man. "She seemed to think, as rich people so often do think, that the world was made for her, and that other

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folk have nothing better to do than carry out her wishes. Not content with asking my father to recommend her the best Catholic registry office, she actually gave us as a reference, and we found that she had provisionally engaged,—and at enormous wages, too,—the whole of poor Edmund Wake's late household. They will be installed at Gaynesford by this time next week."

There seemed nothing more to be said, and a few moments later Domville had left the office, bewildered, and on the whole rather disenchanted, with the interview. He would not have been better pleased had he heard the short colloquy which followed his departure from the Messrs. Plumbes' office.

"Well, there's one thing quite clear—Francis Domville hasn't a suspicion of who the Baroness Karff is. She's none the less his aunt, his own father's half-sister,—for all she was born out of wedlock! I suppose, Joe, you think I ought to have told him, eh?"

"I should have told him," said the son frankly. "I didn't believe till quite the end that he was as ignorant of the truth as he pretended to be,—but I suppose he never knew her or, for the matter of that, her mother. He must have been quite a child when that extraordinary deathbed marriage took place."

"Yes, but he hasn't forgotten it," said old Mr. Plumbe quickly. "I had to tell him after his father's death about the annuity which was still being paid to the Mrs. Domville-over-the-left, and of course he was also informed of the absurdly large sum given to her daughter, that is to the lady who has now blossomed out into the Baroness Karff. Dear me, how well I remember how hard I tried, in this very room, to persuade our young friend's father that a charge on the estate of say £100 a year would be quite enough. But no! He wished to treat her as if she was his legitimate

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sister, and he had fixed on £5000 as the right amount. Then Madame Feyghine persuaded her to go abroad, and that apparently disposed of her for good and all. But what puzzles me," he concluded, with a change of tone, "is what can have brought Domville here this morning? He might just as well have written."

"I can tell you, father, what brought him," — the younger partner considered himself far more conversant with the twists and turns of human nature than his excellent old father could claim to be. "He's come across the other lady, the Baroness's mysterious ward, and he's keen to pursue the acquaintance. Francis Domville," he added sententiously, "has always been the sort of man to burn down the house over his head in order to have light by which to read a love-letter."

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CHAPTER XI

La conscience est un estomac moral, et j'ai cet estomac-là très délicat.

WHEN the Cardinal Archbishop, driving down Piccadilly in his shabby little one-horse brougham, had seen the once familiar face of Francis Domville light up into swift recognition, his Eminence was hastening on his way to what promised to be a difficult and rather painful interview.

A priest has many surprising and difficult moral problems submitted to him for consideration,—and what is true of a priest is even truer of a bishop and of an archbishop. The Cardinal had already spent part of the day, which to most Londoners was still so young, in dealing with one problem, and now he was on his way to deal with another. They were both concerned with that most perplexing of human riddles, the problem of sex, but the one had to do with the matrimonial affairs of an ironmonger, and the other with those of a Princess. So far, the ironmonger's had proved the more disturbing and complicated of the two, and that which touched the Cardinal Archbishop most nearly. One of his own priests, by an ill-considered word,—or was it by a well-considered word?—had set a certain section of the religious press of the country in a blaze, and had given some warrant for the assertion that the Catholic Church not only countenanced gross immorality but, in certain circumstances, something very

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like bigamy. The ironmonger had as a matter of fact committed that gravest of matrimonial offences, and the priest—as had come out in a court of law—had observed to his repentant parishioner, "*You owe a duty to both women.*" That duty the ironmonger had interpreted with a breadth and a freedom which was far indeed from the priest's meaning.

Had the Archbishop been in fact what those who did not love him declared him to be,—a typical Roman ecclesiastic, the ignorant pother made over the case would have left him undisturbed; but he was an Englishman, and, as any Italian or Frenchman could have told you, typically English in his outlook both on life and on religion. The parents to whom he had been a devoted and submissive son till his conscience bade him oppose them, had belonged in a religious sense to the high and dry section of the upper middle class. He had himself taken orders in the Church of England, nay more, he had known what it was to fulfil the duties of the ordinary English citizen,—he had married,—he had become the father of a child. Then Providence had swept away, obliterated, those apparently stable elements in his life,—and so made, if not easy, at least easier, the great renunciation. Those who did not love him,—and there were many such, even among his own communion,—regarded his present asceticism as foreign rather than English; and yet, in very truth, England was to him, and that whether he was conscious of it or not, the centre of the universe, and the Puritan press an important and, on the whole, a highly beneficent factor in that same great universe.

This was why the story of the ironmonger's matrimonial tangle lay heavy on the Cardinal's mind; why also he had as yet given but small and intermittent thought to the question—that of the possible dissolution of a royal marriage—which he was about to discuss

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immediately. The famous English Churchman had been asked, nay, in a sense, commanded, to see the Margravine of Moravia,—that wilful princess who was niece to the Grand Duke Paul,—in order to discover whether anything could be done to dissuade her from bringing what promised to be a very difficult and awkward case before the Roman Curia.

In these days, when the divorce law has become an integral part of our social system, it is difficult, even for a Catholic, to realize the horror with which the possibility of such a law's ever being passed was regarded by the more thoughtful and serious of the religious folk of a late generation. The Cardinal Archbishop, now a very old man, himself belonged to that generation; and it was not the Catholic but the protesting Puritan strain in his nature which shrank with horror from anything that disturbs or violates the sanctity of marriage. Indeed, the statesman who had been the best-loved of his own early friends,—and the giving up of whose friendship had been perhaps the bitterest of the many sacrifices he had made on becoming a Catholic,—was even to this day the strongest human bulwark against any extension of the relief now granted to the unhappily mated.

The Cardinal never heard of the dissolution of a marriage by the Roman Curia without wincing under his keen knowledge of what a weapon each of these cases puts into the hands of the enemies of the Church. His Eminence was known to entertain a strong prejudice against the stage, but there was one of Shakespeare's plays which he would doubtless willingly have had acted more frequently than it is,—and that though it is far from redounding to the glory of him who remains the most magnificent of English Cardinals. Nay more, in connection with the Archbishop's well-known feeling on the delicate subject of dissolution of

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marriage, amazing and often not very tellable stories were current in Catholic society, setting forth the way in which his Eminence was wont to receive those of his spiritual children who came to him hoping to enlist his help and sympathy in the presentation of a suit at Rome.

But these cases, much as he disapproved of them, were comparatively simple, for no English Catholic ever came to him to beseech assistance concerning such a matter without being able to show very real cause why the marriage in question should be dissolved by the English Courts as well as by the Roman Curia; as is known to those interested in these problems, and as the Cardinal was proud to know, the Curia accepts in such delicate questions the decision of an English judge. But the case of the Margravine of Moravia and the Bourbon pretender whom she had married with every possible pomp and ceremony would have received but scant consideration from an English judge and jury,—for the appellant based her claim to relief on the ecclesiastical law which declares that every marriage, being in its sacramental essence a contract between a free man and a free woman, is *ipso facto* null and void when one of the two contracting parties enters into the contract under coercion, or owing to the exertion of undue outside influence.

In theory, the question presented no difficulties to the Archbishop. He knew the law, and could probably have passed an examination as to the various causes which lead the Roman Curia to annul,—or rather to declare void,—a marriage which has been duly celebrated. But when it came to the point,—when any one case calling for relief was set before the Cardinal for his consideration, he was always mentally unwilling to confess that the special case admitted of any doubt, and in this one question of marriage he was entirely

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lacking in the more tolerant charity which animates so many Catholic theologians who, born and bred under an iron rule, are always willing to consider any exception likely to prove that same rule's unbending rigidity. This was why the Cardinal's parchment-coloured, finely-moulded face darkened, and his eyes grew troubled, as he thought of what a scandal would be caused were the royal lady whom he was now on his way to see to obtain her wish.

But, if the Cardinal's sympathies were wholly against any infraction of the Church's hard-and-fast law with regard to the indissolubility of marriage, his integrity revolted against the intriguers who, as he well knew, were now seeking to make him their instrument in this particular matter. He had but the day before been approached by the ambassadors of two great Powers—that of Austria, who, he admitted, had a certain right to interfere, and that of Russia, whose interest in the question seemed much less clear. The Cardinal had your true-born Englishman's distrust of Russia and of Russians, and he had listened with some impatience to the diplomatist's parting words:—

"Your Eminence will have to combat the influence of a certain Baroness Karff, her Highness's favourite lady-in-waiting. She is a clever woman who rules Moravia as well as her mistress, and she, we have reason to believe, was always against the marriage. It was the Baroness who informed the Margravine of the bridegroom's escapade; she also who, even at the last moment, would fain have prevented the ceremony from taking place. And, lastly, it was undoubtedly the Baroness Karff who suggested the possibility of an appeal to Rome. She will almost certainly be present at your audience with the Princess."

"My conversation with the Margravine will necessarily take place in English," the Cardinal had observed,

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rather indifferently, "and this lady-in-waiting is, I presume, German or Austrian?"

The Ambassador had remained silent for a moment, and the Cardinal received the quick impression that he was hesitating as to what his answer should be. "German? Austrian?" he repeated, "—I do not know. Those sort of people, especially the women about a court, have no nationality—they are courtiers! But the Baroness Karff both speaks and understands English remarkably well. If she is present at the audience, it is she and not the Margravine with whom your Eminence will have to deal. The Princess is wax in her hands."

Among the landmarks of a vanished social England which the twentieth century has already seen destroyed, was the house, standing at the corner of Park Lane and Piccadilly, where it had been arranged that the Cardinal's interview with the Margravine of Moravia was to take place.

The rooms of royal palaces are apt to reflect, to a curious extent, contemporary art and taste. If that taste be good, if it incline to the magnificent and stately, then the result, from the point of view of the lover of the beautiful, is particularly happy. But if the taste of the day be poor and mean, contemporary art pretentious and imitative, then the furnishings which should be splendid are apt to become tawdry, and what should be stately beauty is transformed into an almost insolent ostentation. A thousand interests are brought into play, a thousand good reasons found why old lamp should be exchanged for new; and each of those three great human changes,—birth, death, and marriage,—which alone affect the even tenor of most royal lives, is made the excuse for destroying much that has an historical as well as a sentimental and artistic value.

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The house in which the Cardinal Archbishop now found himself owed its immunity from the ruthless hands of the modern decorator to the fact that its royal owner was so far a private personage that no public funds had ever been available for the renovation of his residence; that he had the good fortune to be a soldier, that is, a man of action; and, further, that in an official sense he was a bachelor. Thus no royal bride had provided a reason for the desecration of a mansion which remained, for close on a hundred years, a perfect reflection, not only of the taste, but of the manners and even of the morals, of Georgian London.

The drawing-room, which to-day served as an antechamber to that in which it had been arranged that the Margravine should receive the head of the Catholic Church in England, was dominated by a full-length portrait of George the Fourth; and as the Archbishop gazed thoughtfully at the insolently graceful figure, with which his own frail yet impressive presence formed so curious a contrast, he was fain to admit that "the First Gentleman in Europe" deserved the magnificent title bestowed on him by the adulation—or was it the satire?—of his contemporaries.

As he walked slowly up and down the beautiful room, there fell on his ears, no longer as keen to hear as they had been till lately, the sound of click—click—click. Sometimes it seemed quite near, then further off. It disturbed the course of his thoughts, and, trying to forget it, he turned himself once more to a study of the paintings hanging on the walls.

In a sense, the one feminine element surviving in the great house seemed to be Maria Walpole, the penultimate Duchess of Gloucester. Reynolds and Zoffany had both vied in their efforts to immortalize the evanescent charm of the woman whose tender eyes and roguish smile had concealed a brain as subtle and a knowledge

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of the world as wide as that of old Horace himself. As the Cardinal fixed his keen old eyes on *Zoffany's* more speaking presentment of "My Niece Waldegrave," he seemed to see the thought, almost to hear the words, with which she would have received such a man as himself:—

"As Archbishop of Westminster, you have, in my eyes, no standing, but as a member of the Sacred College,—as a great foreign prelate,—you are more than welcome to my poor home. Nay more,—if you look well, you will see hanging on this very wall, among the miniatures of those to whom I can now avow myself kin, the portrait of Cardinal York, to whom you must admit my dear Duke's King-brother was not ungenerous!"

But his Eminence was not left long to entertain himself with visions of the room's past occupants. A high mahogany door was flung open with all due ceremony, and he found himself ushered into a smaller apartment, which, now flooded with the bright morning sun, seemed to have been dealt with even more tenderly by time than that which he was leaving.

The Cardinal did not consciously note any of the many curious and beautiful things this smaller apartment contained,—he could not have told you, for instance, that everything here perpetuated the rather fantastic calm which reigned in England when George the Third was young; still less that the youngest of the paintings, smiling down from the walls, was that showing a youthful, an almost good-humoured, Queen Charlotte, painted with her boys, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, at her knee, in the days when the Farmer King and his family led a bucolic life at Frogmore. He was, however, instantly aware that the place where he now found himself formed an admirable setting to the two women who stood waiting to receive

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him, and who, if in strong contrast the one to the other, were equally in harmony with their surroundings and background.

Even during the first words and the interchange of formal compliments which the Archbishop knew must precede any attempt at serious conversation, he could well have dispensed with the watchful presence of the lady-in-waiting. And yet the still figure, standing as far from that of her royal mistress as was possible in so small a room, was not in itself impressive. The Margravine's duenna was small, spare, and sallow; her brown hair, streaked with grey, was drawn off her forehead and gathered into an old-fashioned chignon, and her puce-coloured silk dress was partly concealed by a black bib and apron.

But the Archbishop soon became aware that the Baroness Karff's eyes were very bright, and fixed with an alert, watchful gaze on himself. Her hands, however, were not idle, for she was knitting, and there grew under her quick fingers no fancy work, but the beginning of some substantial grey woollen garment such as pious ladies delight to work for the often ungrateful poor. It was the click of her needles—long, bright, gleaming, gold needles—which his Eminence had heard in the other room.

The Cardinal, who, according to his enemies, was not only the friend of Radicals, but himself something of a Radical, asked himself with some impatience why, when he was dealing with such a very difficult and delicate matter as that now occupying his attention, convention demanded at this interview the presence of a third person.

As the Margravine made two steps forward, and, curtseying, kissed the Archbishop's ring, he was impressed, not by her beauty,—he was perhaps sufficiently old-fashioned to accept without question the

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fairy-tale convention that all princesses are beautiful,—but by the look of suffering and pain which dwelt in the wide-open blue eyes, and on the curved mouth set in lines that were just now stern and hard. He realized that she was not only young in years, but young in that most ageing of human processes, suffering; and the perception that this was so, joined to the knowledge that she evidently feared this interview as an ordeal, touched the old man, and softened the tones of the voice in which he began the difficult conversation.

As they sat down, one on each side of a small oval table on which the Margravine's slender hands were clasped, the Archbishop strove to forget the onlooker with whose presence he could so well have dispensed. Then, with the direct simplicity which was perhaps the chief secret of his influence with men and women of widely-differing condition and ideals, he suddenly plunged into the heart of the question he had come to discuss.

Was it necessary—so, very deliberately and solemnly, asked the old man, armed with the authority and wisdom born of large experience—that the Margravine should proceed with her appeal for the dissolution of her marriage? Had she counted the cost, not only to her feminine delicacy, but to her position as exemplar to the women of her own State?

The Cardinal drew, in language far more plain than that which even great Churchmen are apt to use when dealing with princesses, the injury which would be caused, were she to obtain her desire, to the faith of the simple and ignorant, and that, she must remember, not only in the comparatively small country to which she owed the plainest of duties, but in the infinitely larger world beyond. Without meaning to do so, she would instil the belief, were her marriage to be dissolved by the Roman Curia, that in these matters

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Holy Church has one law for the great and another for the lowly. Nay, he went even further, for he ventured to show her that in one sense this is true, and must ever be true, in our imperfect world. How could a Moravian peasant woman, for instance, hope to obtain the same relief which, as she would assume, was to be granted, apparently so easily, to her ruler? Once such a case is presented at Rome, doubtless queen and peasant stand on the same level,—so at least the Cardinal firmly believed,—but, whereas everything conspired to make the Margravine's path to the Holy City straight and thornless, that of an ordinary woman, especially if she was poor and uneducated, would be strewn with obstacles. . . .

Surely these various considerations should cause her to pause and reflect before she took the final steps which must, and that whether she were successful or unsuccessful, cause widespread scandal?

The old man stopped speaking, but still the Margravine remained silent, having received with apparent submission the long exordium. Then she raised her fair head, and her troubled blue eyes met his with a strangely questioning glance. Something in her look encouraged him to press his point yet closer, and again he spoke, his voice becoming very kind, in a sense truly paternal.

"You are young, madam, but you must know enough, if not of life, then of history, to be aware that the sacrifice which is being asked of you is small compared to those made by many who were placed by God where you are now placed. Again and again, princesses and queens, interpreting the duties of their position in heroic fashion, have known how to put aside their deepest feelings, so bearing, not only suffering, but keen humiliation. Divorce," he concluded——

—But quite suddenly the woman in the background,

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the woman whom, for the last few moments, both the Margravine and the Cardinal had forgotten, came forward and intervened in the discussion.

"The word 'divorce,'" she said, with abrupt, harsh decision, and with a certain commonness of accent which the old Englishman's fastidious ear at once detected, "is surely out of place. If our view is correct,—and the case has been submitted to several theologians,—the marriage of her Highness the Margravine *is no marriage*, and, were she to follow the advice of your Eminence, a second ceremony would have to be performed!" and a triumphant smile, which to the Cardinal seemed malicious as well as derisive, flitted over her sallow face. "Our case,—that is the case of her Highness,—is in every way analogous to that of the Princess of Hercules; but our case, so not only I myself but many theologians venture to consider, is a far stronger one than that of her Highness of Hercules. Your Eminence will perhaps remember that the Prince and Princess had been married twelve years, and were the parents of two sons. The marriage was declared not to have taken place, because the Princess was fortunately able to prove by the production of private letters that she had been coerced—in a moral sense dragged—to the altar."

A frown—one that might have over-awed even a more masterful woman than the Baroness Karff—darkened the old man's face. But, even though she quailed a little before that look, her small bright eyes met his glance squarely, as she went on speaking in a thin rather toneless voice: "Our case is infinitely stronger, because we registered our aversion,—our horror,—of the alliance, immediately before the marriage ceremony took place, and that in a formal document."

"The Princess of Hercules' private letters to her

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kinsfolk and friends were regarded as far better proof of her mental state than any formal document could possibly be," observed the Cardinal, suddenly.

"Yes, but we also can produce a private letter,—one written by her Highness the Margravine to the Emperor of Austria, when it became clear to her that Count Grabowitz intended to compel her to proceed with the marriage. That letter," went on the low, quiet, determined voice, "should prove, quite conclusively, my mistress's state of mind at the time of the ceremony."

"And why?" asked the Archbishop, sternly, "why were these protests so carefully registered? Why was the letter to which you allude written? Was it in order that the Roman Curia might be approached immediately the ceremony was over?"

The Margravine started; she made a quick motion of dissent, but the older woman held her ground. "If, as I firmly believe,—indeed, as I know was the case,—the Margravine was coerced into the marriage, surely those about her were well advised in recommending her to follow a course which might undo the evil?"

Then, very suddenly, took place an unexpected, and, from the point of view of one of those present, a most unwelcome act in the little drama. There came a sound from the other room, and the woman whom the Cardinal knew to be the Baroness Karff hurried, with scant ceremony, from the presence of the two whom she had evidently not intended to leave alone together.

Was the audience at an end? The Cardinal rose stiffly from his chair, but at once a slight change,—one which perhaps required an observer as experienced as was his Eminence to perceive,—came over the Margravine. She also got up and moved towards him, and the tall old man, looking down at her, saw that there was mind as well as beauty, feeling as well as sentiment, in her face.

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"Tell me," she said in a quick whisper, her eyes fixed on the door through which the lady-in-waiting had disappeared, "should a woman situated as I am situated, and entrusted with what I have been entrusted, risk the loss of her soul for her people, and for the sake of those whom you tell me she would scandalize, were she to do what I am about to do?"

"Nay," he answered, rather coldly, "if I have made you think that, madam, my words have been vain indeed."

"It is not your Eminence's words, but my own conscience which poses many perplexing questions, and emboldens me to speak to you frankly. Till the events which you know of came to pass, I was a child,"—a flood of colour swept over the lovely, quivering face, which was now reflecting so plainly every conflicting thought and mood,—"and, though I did not know it, such a good child! Then, quite suddenly, I became transformed into a woman, and a woman capable not only of hatred, but of love,"—the last three words were uttered in a voice so low as to be scarcely audible, but her hearer realized that it was these same three words, said so low and in such haste, that were significant and that made appeal, in this strange, sudden outburst of confidence. Yet the Cardinal's face remained impassive, and there came into its rigid lines nothing to show that he had understood, still less that he sympathized with, this cry of a soul in distress.

The Margravine stilled the tumult of feeling she had roused in herself. She felt chilled and hurt; she regretted the impulse which had made her confide in this stern old Englishman, who was so much the priest and so little the courtier.

Then, quite suddenly, the Cardinal answered, and the woman who had, in a sense, thrown herself upon his mercy realized that his words came, in very truth, out

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of the depths of a human and understanding heart. "You spoke just now of love," he said,—"does not the gift of love imply an almost limitless capacity for forgiveness?"

"Surely not when the love was first based on an illusion?"

"All love," he answered, "save the love of God, is based on an illusion."

"But what when that illusion, in my case wholly self-created, has vanished? The person to whom I know you allude, I mean, of course, Don Diego,"—her voice quivered, it was the first time since the marriage ceremony that that name had passed her lips,—"had nothing in common with the man whom I took him to be. His way of life was, it seems, known to all,—except to the ill-fated woman who was chosen to become his wife. The only human creature about me who is disinterested, and who, whatever her ambitions and peculiarities, truly loves me,"—she slightly inclined her head towards the door behind which came the murmur of muttered conversation,—"alone warned me; but even she did not speak with sufficient clearness. I was deaf,—I was blind, to all but my own 'illusion.' And now, if freedom is indeed within my grasp, must I be debarred from securing it?"

As the Cardinal made no immediate answer, she continued more slowly, in a lower voice,—"You speak of my people of Moravia, but what was given to me so suddenly may, so I am told, be as suddenly taken away. And, in any case, is Don Diego a fit ruler to place over such an innocent, primitive people as the Moravians? I was content with life, I had no wish for marriage,—but they told me that I ought in that matter to be guided by others. I consented, and they brought me Don Diego! Surely it was by God's mercy that I discovered his true nature before it was too late? I de-

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clare most solemnly that I would rather have endured a thousand deaths than have gone through that degrading, —that fatal ceremony. If he is indeed my husband, what life shall we be able to make together? Even the thought of him,—of the insult he put upon me,—lets loose every evil instinct in my heart. Your Eminence would perhaps understand me better," she concluded abruptly, "if you were a sinner instead of a saint,—I would even say if you were a woman instead of a priest."

"I was a man," said the Cardinal slowly, "before I became a priest. But it is as a priest that I now say to you that in this matter your own conscience must be the tribunal,—not your private feelings of anger and humiliation,—not those statesmen who wish to use you and your people for their own ends,—not even the Baroness Karff. You yourself are alone the judge of what in this most difficult matter it is right for you to do."

The door giving access to the drawing-room swung slowly open, and the Baroness Karff stood on the threshold. Again a sudden, subtle change came over the Margravine; she had already opened her lips to speak, but now she closed them, and, curtseying, kissed the Archbishop's ring.

The audience was at an end.

And yet the Cardinal still waited,—waited till, with obvious reluctance, and drawn towards the tall lean figure as if in spite of herself, the curious-looking woman whose return had put so quick an end to the Margravine's confidences, advanced towards him. She also—but with her the action lacked the easy grace with which it was performed by her mistress—bent low and placed her withered lips on the episcopal ring; but the Cardinal was not minded to part thus with the Baroness Karff. She interested him; he felt he would like to know more of her,—to penetrate further into her mind. With a smile

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which lit up very pleasantly his worn austere face, he took the ringless hand of the enemy against whom he had been warned, and who had in a certain sense vanquished him in fair fight. "When I first came into this room," he said, "I took you for a German and a Lutheran,—I now know you to be an Englishwoman and a Catholic. Tell me, how long have you been with her Highness?"

"Ever since she was born, your Eminence. That is perhaps why her Highness allows me sometimes to offer her humble counsel and advice. As to what you thought —I fear I am but an indifferent Catholic; as to my country—I have become more Austrian than English, for it is a long time since I left England. You probably know the place where I was born,"—her voice faltered nervously, and then she added, as if some outside influence compelled, the one word, "Gaynesford."

"Gaynesford?" exclaimed the Cardinal with some surprise, "—then you are related to the present Francis Domville?"

"Very distantly so," she answered hastily, and her eyes fell before his penetrating glance, "my grandfather was a tenant; we lived on the estate, and it was through Miss Lettice Domville, who is now Madame Feyghine, that I went to Petersburg, and so, later, to Moravia."

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CHAPTER XII

She came, no more a phantom to adorn
A moment, but an inmate of the heart,
And yet a spirit, there for me enshrined
To penetrate the lofty and the low.

It was six o'clock in the morning, exactly a week after the fête at Hague House, and Francis Domville, standing in the deep shade thrown by the lime-trees which formed a vast green screen across the two wings of Gaynesford Manor, looked earnestly at the splendid mass of buildings which he called home.

He and Mitroff had already been at the presbytery three days, but he had not yet seen either the lady of the pavilion or the Baroness Karff; and now, to his longing fancy, the house, spread out before him in the glistening sunlight, looked like a great rose-red jewel casket, of which the contents were not only hidden, but mysterious, unattainable.

The three days had worn themselves away very slowly, and Domville had had almost too much time for thought. To his surprise, the Russian doctor and the English priest had soon found points of sympathy. Differing in race, in education, and, above all, in their view of the universe and of the government thereof, each looked on life from the point of view of the Solitary; and, as Francis Domville was essentially a man of action, the companionship of the other two weighed on him.

The time which had elapsed since their meeting,

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instead of partly effacing the image of the woman who had, for a few brief moments, played the rôle of Marie Antoinette to his Axel Fersen, had seemed to fix her more clearly in his mind; and yet, while longing to see her again, he feared lest there should come with this second meeting a certain measure of disenchantment. What if, with the costume, and the atmosphere of romance that costume had created about them, should have vanished that blending of reserve and artless confidence which had so moved and attracted him?

A feeling difficult to analyse made Domville shrink from intruding boldly in his own house on the Baroness Karff and her friend; and the same feeling of perhaps over-strained delicacy had prevented his approaching even the outside of the house at those times when it was probable, or even possible, that he might come across its new inmates. Not till this morning had he ventured to come so near, but at so early an hour, and at the place where he was now standing, he felt secure from observation.

Many of the houses owned by the traditional Catholic families of England have retained an extraordinary look of having stood still while time went on. Indeed, it often happens, and especially was it so with Gaynesford, that a dwelling which has always belonged to those of the old faith has about it the still pathos of a ruin. The great house, standing in bare splendour amid the wild Surrey commons, remained one of the very few sixteenth-century buildings still left in England which possessed mullions of terra-cotta, the "Flanders bricks" of old Aubrey. Four hundred years of exposure to sun, wind, and rain had not affected the perfection of the quaint and lovely mouldings, enriched by a thousand delicate fancies gathered from the imagery of mediæval legend and religious symbol.

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But, with the slow passage of time, the brickwork and terra-cotta had acquired an infinite variety of ruddy tints, softened by the greys and greens of the lichens and mosses which found secure hold on every jutting cornice and beneath the clean-cut traceries of the bays.

Gaynesford was once described by an exquisite writer, who constituted himself the historian of a house of which he was for some years the master, as the embodiment of the personal sense of beauty of some creative genius. Fortunately for posterity, Francis Domville's ancestors, and especially those among them who had lived so furtive and secret an existence during the latter part of the seventeenth and the whole of the eighteenth century, had possessed neither the means nor apparently the desire to alter and so mar the perfection of their dwelling. Nay more, perhaps because they were so harshly denied any part in the political and social life of their time, these men and women became all the more narrowly devoted to the only place where they could ensure obtaining the respect and honour of those about them.

There had always been, and that even as late as the present Francis Domville's childhood, a very close connection between Gaynesford and the Continent—with Rome, with Paris, and with Douai. During the French Revolution, the estate was naturally the resort of émigrés, and members of the curious French colony settled at Juniper Hill often rode over to be hospitably entertained at Gaynesford Manor. Sons and daughters in each succeeding generation left the beloved place to enter religion on the Continent; the Sacred College had numbered a Domville among its members; and a great-uncle of Anne Leycester and Francis Domville had spent, as Prior of St. John, a long lifetime at Rhodes.

Such was the background of the young man's life, and one of which he was always intensely conscious,

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although, like many Catholics of his generation, he would have found it easier to die for his faith than he now did to live in it. He had come to the age, he was now in the mood, to do something which should justify the wordless renunciations, and the long fidelity to a spiritual ideal, of the men and women who had preceded his father and himself at Gaynesford. They had not all been saints,—the streaks of character which made Madame Feyghine at once disliked and feared had come to her with Domville blood, and had been handed down from remote generations. But even so Domville felt more really kin to these same violent self-willed ancestors than to his kindly, easy-going father, whose follies had never expanded into vices, and yet whose selfishness, and eager grasping after pleasures he believed legitimate, had ended in a series of painful financial embarrassments, and the abandonment of Gaynesford to strangers.

After his father's death, that is in early youth, during the years spent by him in an atmosphere so different from that which surrounded the house at which he was now gazing, Domville had sometimes felt a curious affinity to his first namesake—to that Francis Domville who, being caught up in the web woven about Anne Bullen by Henry the Eighth, came to so untoward an end on Tower Hill, and who, the night before his execution, wrote, in a letter to Thomas Cromwell, a sentence in which was embodied the philosophy of life, not only of many of his own contemporaries, but of civilized man throughout the ages: "I had thought to have lived in abomination yet these twenty and thirty years; then to have made amends."

The writer of that naive confession had been very young,—not much over twenty,—and his latest descendant had by now long outlived the mental state embodied in the words, but he had found,—as doubtless

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his ancestor would have found had he been able to carry out his desire,—that it is easier to fulfil the first part of such an experiment than to pursue it to its illogical conclusion.

But now, his eyes fixed on the place where so many human dramas had been played out, Domville suddenly reminded himself that one of his own immediate predecessors had actually accomplished that making of amends to which the first Francis, he of Tower Hill, had looked as the purging of a life of "abomination."

Out of the past there rose up before him a scene which had impressed itself with terrible distinctness on his childish imagination, for at the time it took place he had been but nine years old. There, behind the four central windows of the building before him was the room, still unchanged in any particular, in which the last scene of a strange drama had been enacted before his young, amazed eyes.

Domville saw the still vigorously fashioned figure of his grandfather, propped up in the centre of the four-post bed, outlined against the bright blue curtains embroidered with white lilies which had been first placed there to do honour to a visit from the Comte d'Artois. Since the death of his wife, very early in their joint lives, the old squire had never slept in this, the state bedchamber of Gaynesford Manor, but he had asked to be moved there when he had known himself to be near death. It was there, not only in the presence of his kinsfolk, but also within hearing of those of his tenantry who crowded the passages outside, that he had uttered, in a loud resonant voice, a public act of contrition for the scandal which his conduct in a certain matter had caused to those to whom he should have been an example.

The scene had partaken of the mingled pieties, cruelties, and humanities of a far-off mediæval world.

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All those present had been moved to tears, excepting the little Francis Domville; he listening, his hand tightly held by his own father, to the strange and terrible words spoken by his grandfather, had been filled with feelings of angry protest.

The public act of humiliation had been immediately followed by the solemnization of a death-bed marriage, which had again filled the youngest of those present with a curious sensation of instinctive recoil. The bride, a middle-aged woman who, together with her now grown-up daughter, lived within the confines of the park, had always been well known by sight to the little boy,—but her house had been banned; he was free of every other cottage and farm on the place, but to this one house he must never, never go. And so, when witnessing the singular marriage ceremony, he was quite able to understand the fact that this woman, whom those about him had not considered fit for him to know, was now being turned into something tantamount to a grandmother to his own proud little self.

Not till many years had gone by,—not indeed till his own father's death,—had Francis Domville heard the end of the story. Then, among other facts laid before him by the Messrs. Plumbe, he learnt of the annuity paid to an obscure, unrecognized Mrs. Domville, and of the sum of five thousand pounds raised and given to her equally obscure and unrecognized daughter,—a daughter of the house in blood though not in name.

Suddenly the great house began to waken into life,—blinds were pulled up, windows flung open, and from where Domville stood he even heard the unbarring of the huge nail-studded front doors. Unwilling to be seen in his present position even by the servants of his tenant, he turned and retreated further under the trees.

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Before engaging on the path which would lead him back to the presbytery, he cast one last look at the house; as he did so, his eyes became focussed on a curious object, which he was able to tell himself had certainly not been there a few moments before, and his lips noiselessly found the words, "Why that must be, that is—Jacob's ladder!" Connecting one of the windows of what had been the private chapel of Gaynesford Manor with the gravelled courtyard was a hanging staircase, which, standing out and stiffly resting on the ground beneath, was sharply defined against the ruddy walls, the delicately moulded arabesques, of the left wing. The sight of this peculiar object recalled to Francis Domville a thousand incidents of his childhood, as well as certain painful memories connected with the first letting of Gaynesford to strangers.

The privilege of a private chapel is only granted to Catholics on the clear understanding that the faithful are to be freely admitted to take part in the services. At Gaynesford, from Saxon times onwards, Mass had been continuously celebrated, and that in despite of Elizabethan persecutions, and, what had been in many respects more deadening and devastating, the penal statutes of the Georges. During that long period of time, those scattered folk in the neighbourhood who had kept true to the old faith had made their way, not only on Sundays, but on weekdays, through the smaller and greater chambers of the ground floor, and so up the broad oak staircase to the long gallery, part of which had been screened off during something like four hundred years for the celebration of the sacred rites.

The inconvenience caused by this custom,—the intrusion of strangers bringing with them dust in summer, mud in winter, vexed the housewifely mind of that Mrs. Domville who had been Francis's mother; and it was she who had devised the expedient of the outside

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stairway,—she who had compelled her husband unwillingly to consent to that inhospitable device for fulfilling the letter, rather than the spirit, of the law.

Francis Domville had seen, with all a child's delight in so unusual a contrivance, the first use of what the old chaplain had dubbed Jacob's ladder; ten years later he had been present on the day when the chapel had been dismantled, and he had even helped to store this very staircase, together with all the other chapel furniture, in the loft above the Long Gallery.

The dismantling of the chapel had been, at any rate to the boy himself, the first clear, irrefutable proof of his father's ruin, and the material change in his own prospects.

Years later, the owner of Gaynesford, not old in years, but prematurely broken, and, though he did not know it, near to death, had come back for a few weeks to the old place; and an effort had been made, of which the memory this morning filled Domville with sudden soreness, to obtain once more the privilege of a private chapel. But the new church was but a short distance from the house, and so the request had been refused; and this morning Domville felt pained to know that, while his father had failed to procure this concession, the Baroness Karff had apparently succeeded with surprising ease.

He pulled out his watch; it was a quarter to seven, and, with his eyes still fixed on that which to himself was still called Jacob's ladder, Domville walked slowly forward, curious to see what was about to happen——

He had not long to wait. First into view came Father Copley, followed by the boy whose duty it would be to serve the Mass about to be said; but, when at the foot of the aerial staircase, the priest motioned the lad to go up; he then waited and looked about him, and Domville, still securely hidden under

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the trees, wondered idly whether the news that Mass was again being celebrated in Gaynesford Manor had spread sufficiently far to increase the tiny congregation to which Father Copley daily ministered. At last there appeared one solitary old man, and the sight of him also evoked memories of Domville's childhood, for he recognized him as Blake, his father's old butler, who was now living in the village on the pension which he had amply earned. It was for Blake, then, that the priest had been waiting, for, after having helped him up the steep wooden steps, Father Copley quickly followed and disappeared within the narrow window of which the latticed casement had been once more removed.

A few more moments went by, and then Domville advanced out of the shadow into the sunshine, and every window giving on the great quadrangular space now commanded a view of the tall, lithe figure of the owner of Gaynesford. For some minutes he remained irresolutely standing by the bottom plank of the staircase, even while telling himself that he had as much right to effect an entrance into the private chapel as had any other passer-by.

As he hesitated, there fell on the still air the grating sound of a pulley, and the steps, suddenly leaving the ground, ascended before his eyes into the air. He uttered an involuntary exclamation of annoyance and irritation, and, as he did so, the grating noise ceased. Looking up, Domville saw two figures standing at the window,—those of a man and a woman. The man was his old friend Blake; the face of the woman was unknown to him, but some instinct told him that the plain sallow face staring down at him, the small, bright eyes which seemed to be scanning him with peculiar incisive keenness, belonged to the Baroness Karff.

Half mechanically, Domville lifted his cap; the Baroness apparently accepted this as the beginning

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of acquaintance, for, as she nodded, her face relaxed something of its grim watchfulness, and, saying a word to the old man standing by her side, she left the window. At once the pulley was reversed, the stairway a moment later again rested on the gravel, and Francis Domville realized that the question of his thus entering his own house had been decided for him.

As he stepped from the outdoor light into that tapestried portion of the long gallery which formed once more an antechamber to the private chapel, Domville felt an odd sensation steal over him; he seemed to have suddenly gone back to that period of his boyhood when all was still well with the Domvilles of Gaynesford, and when he himself, with the unconscious egoism of his age, was eagerly looking forward to all that life might be supposed to offer the heir of this great place, and the bearer of so honoured a name.

The curtains were pulled aside, and the young man, filled with complex emotions, walked through into the chapel. Then, in a moment, his eyes,—nay, every pulsing feeling of his being,—became concentrated on a figure, kneeling with veiled head bowed low between her hands, at a solitary prie-dieu placed close to the tarnished gilt rails before the altar,—for he knew it to be that of the woman who had drawn him to Gaynesford.

She looked, in her floating white gown and under the long veil shrouding and deadening the brightness of her hair, the embodiment of Supplication. And, as Domville gazed at her, he became aware—and the feeling which suddenly oppressed him was a precursor of many other like feelings—that there was a rather piteous abandonment, something that told of pain and humiliation, in the lines of the graceful figure which had held itself so proudly during those brief moments when they

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had first met and held such significant speech the one with the other.

As he mechanically made his way to one of the few scattered chairs placed in the centre of the chapel, between the altar rails and the long oak benches on which were massed together his tenant's large temporary household, Domville became aware that the Baroness Karff was looking round at him, a smile, evidently friendly in intention, hovering over her tightly shut lips and grim jaw. Rather to his relief, the kneeling figure by the altar remained quite still, either unaware of or indifferent to the presence of a stranger.

That he should see her thus,—in a way so different from that which he had pictured would be their second meeting, had on Domville both an immediate and a latent effect; it seemed to make her, in a sense nothing else could have done, part of his hidden life—that life which, running parallel to our day-to-day existence, is composed of and to a certain extent governed by memories.

Francis Domville seldom consciously recalled his childhood, which, indeed, had not been in any special sense happy or satisfactory. But again, for the second time this morning, the past came back, flooding his mind with strange radiance, and filling him with unwonted tenderness. He saw himself as a grave and rather priggish little boy, going off alone behind the very curtain which now formed a background to the figure before him, in order that he might make his first Confession; and kneeling by the tarnished gold rail close to where *her* prie-dieu was now placed, he had made his first Communion. . . .

It was clear that someone formerly well acquainted with the chapel of Gaynesford Manor had supervized every detail of its present arrangement. Not only were the dark purple curtains hung in the rather peculiar

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order in which they had first been placed in order to shield the light from his grandfather's failing sight, but before the black marble figure of the Blessed Virgin were the sconce candles used long ago. The same mysterious hand had even gone to the pains of placing at either end of the altar rails the two curious lead figures, the one a Saracen and the other a Crusader, who to Francis Domville's childish imagination had symbolized the powers of light and darkness, but who now both seemed to offer him an equal welcome to his birthplace.

As he made a sincere effort to concentrate his thoughts on what was taking place on the altar, his eyes became fixed on the pre-Reformation carved wood tabernacle, containing underneath a receptacle, added but a hundred years ago, in which had been placed the infinitely pathetic, though to a child's mind rather terrifying, relics of some of those English-speaking martyrs whose memory is kept so green in the old Catholic houses of England and Scotland. Hidden closely away for some two centuries, they had been found by a party of happy children—Francis Domville's great-uncles and aunts—while playing among the priests' hiding-places and secret chambers for which Gaynesford was famous. Each relic had been ticketed with a slip of parchment, and to-day Domville recalled, with a whimsical smile, that there before him, only hidden from his sight by a thin strip of carved wood, lay one of the fingers of Joseph Plumbe's martyred ancestor.

Then came a stir and rustling about him; for Father Copley was saying the First Gospel, and the congregation had risen. Domville's lips began to move; he followed each of the stately sentences of the Nicene Creed. As uttered by the honest, reverend voice of the priest now saying Mass, they acquired a tremendous,—almost a new,—significance for Francis Domville. And yet, as he knelt, and as he rose from his knees, he remained

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acutely conscious of the white figure before him, and that although he felt her to be here in sanctuary, guarded by a flight of gentle ghosts,—the spirits of those women of his own blood who had prayed here in the past, and whose lives had been instinct with abnegation and with devotion to a high spiritual ideal.

As Domville, who had been the first to leave the chapel, walked across the broad gravelled space which stretched between the two wings of the old manor-house, he felt as if henceforth Gaynesford would be the centre of his life, and not merely a half-painful half-fragrant memory and ideal of what might have been if not his father only, but he himself, had belonged to a different type of Englishman.

He had not been long on the road in the park leading to the presbytery when he was joined by the priest, bearing a message from the Baroness Karff expressing a hope, or rather—so Father Copley explained with a smile—issuing a command, that they would both come and see her that afternoon.

"I have never, till just now, seen my tenant," said Domville hesitatingly; "but the Plumbes gave me the most extraordinary account of her!"

"Yes," said the priest, "I must confess she strikes me as a very peculiar sort of woman,—in fact, it's very strange to see such a person posing as the mistress of Gaynesford."

"She's not going to be here very long," the other answered, rather sorely.

"She told me only a month or five weeks. I—I wonder, Domville, if you know who she is?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Domville. "I only know that she is called the Baroness Karff, and that Joseph Plumbe rather officiously suggested that I

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should call on her." He waited a little,—then, in a tone that sounded strange to himself, he asked, "Have you seen the lady who is with her, for whose sake she seems to have come here?"

The priest for a moment looked rather perplexed, as if the other's simple question found him unprepared with an answer. "Yes, I have seen her, but only at Mass," he said at last. "Both she and the Baroness Karff seem anxious to be left alone; in fact, the Baroness only sent for me, as I soon discovered, in order that she might cross-examine me as to the people in the neighbourhood. She seemed relieved to find that there were no foreigners staying near here. Do you think,—I have been wondering,—if I ought to tell her of Dr. Mitroff?"

"Certainly not," said Domville, with decision. "Whom you choose to have as your guest is absolutely no business of hers. You confirm the idea I have formed,—that she must be an extraordinarily disagreeable and arrogant woman."

"My dear Domville," said Father Copley frankly, "we are speaking rather at cross-purposes. I thought, from something you said just now, that you were in the secret; I now gather that you are not. Perhaps I ought to tell you that the Baroness Karff is placed in a difficult and delicate position. She has very urgent reasons for wishing her identity, and that of her friend, concealed. If you are interested in the matter,—if you wish to know any more,—you had better ask the Cardinal Archbishop."

"The Archbishop!" cried Domville. "Then was it through the Archbishop that she heard of Gaynesford?"

"No, I think not; in fact, I think we may certainly say not,—but I don't know how to say any more without betraying what I have been told to keep secret."

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The priest spoke with some distress. It seemed to him most unlikely that the prohibition was meant to apply to the actual owner of Gaynesford Manor, and, had Domville pressed him, he would certainly have told him enough to have given the other very serious reason to leave the place instantly. There was in Francis Domville a certain thorny pride which had always shrunk from association with those who rightly or wrongly regarded themselves as superior to himself. The knowledge that the woman of whom he was now accustomed to think as the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg was in truth Margravine of Moravia would undoubtedly have caused him to wrench himself free from the attraction which had brought him here. He was not the stuff of which a Ruy Blas is made,—however fascinating, however alluring, the association with a Donna Sol.

But, while Father Copley was hesitating, Domville checked him, and that sharply: "I have no wish to pry into the Baroness Karff's secrets. I already supposed, from the way the Plumbes spoke of her, that there was some mystery—some fact she wishes to keep concealed." Then a sudden thought, a curious half-vision of the truth, found its way into his mind: "Only one word," he said; "have these ladies any reason to fear any intrusion here on their privacy? Is there anyone whose presence they have cause to dread?"

"Yes," said the priest, rather relieved at the turn the conversation was taking,—surely now he would be able to say all that was necessary, and that without betraying his trust: "The Baroness Karff is undoubtedly afraid of her own and her friend's whereabouts being known; that is why she is so anxious to know who happens just now to be in the neighbourhood."

The two men walked back to the presbytery in silence, Domville's mind seething with the recollection of half a

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dozen stories, some known to him personally, others which had reached a wide publicity, in which men, posing as disappointed lovers, had tormented the lives of women on whom they had no claim. The thought that she to whom he could now give a name was perhaps being thus persecuted added a touch of protective chivalry to the other feelings with which he already regarded her.

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CHAPTER XIII

A brave old house! A garden full of bees,
Large dropping poppies, and queen hollyhocks
With butterflies for crowns—tree peonies,
And pinks and goldilocks.

THE second meeting of Francis Domville and the woman who had produced so instant an impression on his heart and on his imagination, took place in the great hall of Gaynesford Manor,—in the pictured and blazoned presences of those mighty personages who had played so disastrous a part in the history of the young man's ancestors.

Filled with an agitation, and a feeling of suspense and nervous tension, which he could neither control nor subdue, Domville had been at once amused and irritated by the formality with which his tenant chose to surround herself. Immediately on entering the house, he and Father Copley had been requested to sign their names in a book; and not till after some considerable delay, during which it was clear the Baroness had been informed of their arrival, had they been bidden to follow the manservant who was to introduce them to her presence.

One of the doors which open straight from the great hall on to the terrace bounding so nobly the park front of Gaynesford Manor, was wide open; and through this aperture the bright afternoon light streamed in, battling victoriously with the subdued, many tinted gleams flung down from the painted glass. For a moment Domville

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was able to distinguish nothing of what lay beyond this broad shaft of light; then there emerged, vision-wise, a group composed of two feminine figures, the one sitting, the other standing, in the centre of the vast apartment. The younger lady, still wearing the white gown in which Domville had seen her that morning, sat bending over a tambour frame. A needleful of blue silk was poised in the air in her hand, and she seemed to be lending a rather unwilling attention to what her companion was saying.

The Baroness Karff was knitting as she talked. Her long gold knitting-pins, furnished with large jewelled tops, flashed in and out, and formed an extraordinary contrast, even to masculine eyes, with the humble light grey worsted shawl—or was it a petticoat?—on which her lean brown hands were engaged. She was bending forward apparently urging on her friend a course to which the other demurred, and both Domville and the priest had the instant impression that she was endeavouring to persuade the Countess Sabine to withdraw.

She evidently failed in her object, but Domville was destined henceforth always to think of the Baroness Karff as standing and dominating those about her. The upper part of her face and head were curiously prominent, and the man in whose life she was henceforth to count for so much stared uneasily at the bulging forehead and scanty hair drawn tightly back under a broad Alsatian bow. To the priest who, quietly observant, had preceded Domville, something at once powerful and repellent in the Baroness Karff's appearance recalled, when thus seen in juxtaposition to the exquisitely fashioned creature to whom she was speaking, one of those human foils, misshapen dwarf or court jester, who were at one time the cruel delight of mediæval painters; and it was she, rather than her com-

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panion, who compelled Father Copley's interest and attention.

As the two men came forward,—as their names resounded through the great hall, the Baroness swiftly straightened her short, sturdy figure. She circled round the still seated younger lady, and came forward to meet her visitors, making, as she did so, an odd little bow, first to Domville and then to the priest.

For a few moments the three stood together in an embarrassed silence. Then, "I am pleased to see you," observed the Baroness at last, "I am obliged to you for having come,"—and, as had been the case that morning when first perceiving Domville from the window of the gallery, her face became benign, even kindly. The priest murmured some civil answer, and she added, "It is a very fine day, a very warm and agreeable day." She spoke with a peculiar accent, but Domville at once said to himself, "Plumbe was right! She may not care for the fact to be known, but she undoubtedly started life as an Englishwoman. Who is she, and what has she been? Surely I have never seen her? And yet—and yet—where the devil *have* I seen her?"

Then his heart leapt,—for the figure who had sat immobile, bending over the tambour frame, suddenly lifted her head. Rising, she joined the standing group, and in a voice with which Domville felt himself already intimately acquainted came the words: "Will you please present these gentlemen to me?"

The Baroness Karff hesitated, then reluctantly, and again speaking in what Domville felt sure was an affected accent, she said: "The Reverend Father Copley, Mr. Domville,—the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg."

Father Copley bowed coldly and gravely. He deprecated and disapproved of the comedy in which he was

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now compelled to take part. Some instinct warned him that Francis Domville had a right to know the truth, and that not only as to the Margravine's rank but as to that more human and intimate matter which concerned the case now pending at Rome. He did not foresee, as perhaps an older English priest would have done, and as any foreign ecclesiastic of his own age would certainly have foreseen, any danger of a sentimental complication,—and yet he was at the time so far aware of the singular and passionate scrutiny with which the two before him gazed at one another, that he remembered it long afterwards as forming one of the first links in a chain of which he was soon to know the resisting strength.

The approach of passion brings with it to many men and women the sudden awakening of certain primitive instincts for which the need in our highly civilized life has on the whole gone by. Of these instincts,—these methods of self-defence, the greatest is the power of making what is seem otherwise. Possessed of a headstrong and fearless nature, the Margravine had been early deprived of those in whom would have been vested the natural right to guide and to rebuke her. She, therefore, attached, as do most members of her caste, an exaggerated value to truth, while she despised —as only those who have never had reason to conceal their thoughts can despise—lack of sincerity. And yet now,—after the one long probing glance they had exchanged, during the brief words of introduction spoken by the Baroness Karff,—no look, no tone, betrayed the fact that she had seen Francis Domville before.

A second meeting, following that when there has first arisen between a man and a woman that sense of mysterious, beckoning affinity, for which each language has its own typical idiom, has always its attendant dangers as well as its previsioned joys. In the case of

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Domville and Sabine, the treacherous possibilities of doubt and disappointment were intensified owing to the fact that at Hague House not only had they posed as other than they were, but each had been wearing the costume which, above all others belonging to history, clothes its wearers in a stately panoply of romance,—a panoply which, while bringing out most cunningly a woman's secret graces, seems to lend to modern man the ancient masculine attributes of valour and chivalry. But both now bore well the ordeal brought about by the change of dress.

To a woman accustomed to see the men introduced into her presence almost invariably wearing some form of gala or military costume, Domville's unpretending dark country clothes lent distinction to his appearance; she did not yet note the rather peculiar features of his face,—the shape of his square forehead, the clean, determined cut of mouth and chin, the gleaming, light grey eyes,—which made of Francis Domville an arresting human being rather than a good-looking man. Instead, she realized with a certain shock of surprise that here, standing before her, was a man of to-day, bolder, more masterful, above all infinitely surer of himself, than the hundred-year-dead hero of romance with whom it had pleased her fancy to identify him.

As to Domville, there was in his heart no room for revulsion,—even in the chapel he had found no difficulty in merging and conciliating the rather unreal figure which had dwelt with him, and in whose pursuit he had been engaged, in the woman whose name he now believed to be Sabine Reiffersberg.

As she now stood before him,—her head thrown back with the fearless, challenging gesture which had so powerfully appealed to him during their first meeting,—she seemed, even more than she had been in the pavilion at Hague House, set apart, already linked

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with him in some close wordless understanding. He longed, with an impatient, eager longing, to be alone with her,—to compel her confidence as to what ailed not so much her body as her heart. They had all said, the lawyers and the priest, that she was ill,—that this was why she had been brought here by the Baroness Karff; her blue eyes were rimmed with shadows, and when he had first seen her sitting with the older woman's forbidding figure bending towards her, there had been a touch of languor, of despondency, in her look.

As if in answer to his unspoken desire, she detached herself from the group, and walked slowly down the great hall. Domville hesitated a moment, and then followed her, but when he reached her side he waited for her to speak——

"I well understand," she said at last, and her voice was rather tremulous, "why you were so unwilling to leave this place, even for a month; but we, my friend and myself, are very grateful to you,—for the first time for many weeks I have begun to sleep well, and I have even dreamt happy dreams."

She spoke slowly, as if partly communing with herself, and instead of looking at the man she was addressing, she kept her eyes fixed on a portrait of the stern Tudor woman who had entertained Queen Elizabeth in the very place where they were then standing. And yet —yet Domville felt as if his companion had bestowed on him an intimate confidence,—told him some hidden secret of her heart. In return, he ran the risk the modern man so greatly dreads,—that of making himself appear ridiculous; for none knew better than he did that sentiment of a certain exalted quality has gone out of fashion. "Every old house," he said, "has a hearth spirit, who watches over its fortunes and does battle with the ghosts of the past. My hearth spirit has led you to Gaynesford, and it will be my business to keep you here."

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The Countess Sabine was touched and amused by his words. She had been for a moment so afraid that with Fersen's sword Domville would have unbuckled the spirit of romance—the spirit which had so moved her when he was playing Axel Fersen to her Marie Antoinette.

His next words made her feel less easy, and the painted lips of the lady at whose portrait she was gazing so earnestly seemed to whisper: "You are wrong, Sabine. You should be ashamed of allowing this stranger, this Englishman, to speak to you as he is doing. He either means nothing or—everything. If nothing, then it is most unfitting that you should engage in what the English call a flirtation. If—if—as you are secretly inclined to hope, he is about to redeem the promise he made when you were both playing at being others than yourselves, then what place is there in your life for love?" The words which had so touched her were: "Tell me of something hard and difficult that you want done, that I may do it." As she made no answer, as she kept her eyes fixed on the portrait, he added, "As I told you at Hague House——"

"At Hague House?"—she turned and faced him; her face became suffused with colour, and so woman was she, so man was he, that for a moment Domville asked himself with jealous dismay if it were indeed possible that she had not till that moment recognized him. The thought that she could have so played Marie Antoinette to another's Axel Fersen filled him with unreasonable but none the less painful jealousy—jealousy of his own phantom self.

Perhaps the Countess Sabine divined something of the unquiet spirit she had raised, for, "Let us go back to the Baroness," she said a little hurriedly, "and we will all go out of doors. The priest is making his

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adieux, but your way back to the presbytery leads, I think, through the gardens. I had been here two days before I discovered the gardens," she continued, smiling gravely; and then she went forward and took her place by the priest's side, and Domville, listening to her voice, and only to her voice, though he exchanged civil platitudes with the Baroness Karff, realized that Father Copley, at first oddly constrained and awkward in manner, was becoming insensibly thawed by her simplicity.

The walled gardens of Gaynesford Manor stretch away behind the right wing of the stately old house, and, enclosed in high walls, keep their many beauties hidden from those chance visitors who come to Gaynesford either attracted by the fame of what is now the most magnificent old painted glass left in England, or in quest of a tardily appreciated style of domestic architecture.

At the door giving access to the gardens a change took place; the priest fell behind with the Baroness, and Domville went forward with Sabine. She was balancing a red parasol in her hand; it threw a glow on her oval face, on her fair hair which, drawn off her forehead, was arranged in much the same way as it had been when he had first seen her. They walked down the narrow paths, between flowering bushes and massed sweet-scented blossoms, in a silence only broken by the low ceaseless murmur which makes a garden so peopled a place in the hot summer sun.

Domville longed to be alone with his companion in the depth of a forest,—that is in some still place where there would be nothing to distract her attention from himself, and from all that he felt impelled to say to her. Again he welcomed with beating heart that strange, long-lost sensation of buoyant youth which had returned to him during their first meeting in the pavilion,

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yet he was oppressed by the sense that this delicious buoyancy was perhaps a fleeting thing, only lent to him in order that he might find the rather desperate courage to tell this dear stranger that he loved her, —that theirs was a unique instance, calling, on the man's part, for none of those preliminaries which to the cynic are the most enchanting, because the least binding, chapters of love's fairy tale.

Now and again the sound of the priest's voice, answering some question put to him by the middle-aged woman who seemed to feel so insatiable a curiosity concerning the lonely neighbourhood, would recall Domville suddenly to a sense of everyday reality. Then would come irritation and despondency, and a fear that he was about to make himself odious and absurd in the eyes of the only human being whose sudden presence had ever aroused in him so unlooked-for and complicated a gamut of emotions.

At last Sabine and Domville came to a curious little building, which to Domville was full of associations of his childhood. Older and more substantial than is wont to be the modern summer-house, it was placed at the juxtaposition of two right-angle walls, and might indeed in times gone by have served as the living place of some misanthropic gardener, for it consisted of two good rooms. The lower one was windowless, but ample light and air came in through the two doors opening on converging paths. This lower room had always contained, as long as Domville could remember anything, a round table and an old oak chest, two or three chairs and a bookcase filled with a considerable number of children's books,—literature belonging to a day when only little books were printed for little people, and when small, rough woodcuts formed the only illustrations. A tiny winding staircase led to the room above, which was situated immediately below the conical, tiled roof.

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In this curious little building generations of Domville children had spent their summer days.

Hardly thinking of what he was doing,—only anxious to prolong the moments, now fast flying by, Domville walked through from the open sunlight into the shadowed round space where it seemed to him that time had stood still for twenty years. And yet there were signs which made it clear that the place was being habitually used as a sitting-room, and he was about to retreat hurriedly out into the open air again, when the Countess Sabine stopped him with a word: "Is it true," she asked in a soft voice, "that this was the place where you and your sister used to play when you were children, Mr. Domville?"

"Yes," he said, "but not together; my sister is much younger than I am." Then he turned and his eyes met hers; they were at last alone, for the young priest and the Baroness Karff were standing talking some yards away, in the middle of the path. "I suppose," said the Countess Sabine irrelevantly, "that Fersen and the Queen always spoke in French?"

Domville suddenly divined that she wished to re-establish between them that hundred-year-old barrier or romance for which he, at least, had now no further use. He turned away his eyes from her face, and took up a piece of chalk which had lain probably more years than months inside one of the shallow ledges of the bookcase. He opened a drawer where lay two small old-fashioned slates. Across the top of one of these were rudely cut the words, "Anne Domville's slate." It was this one he chose, and, bending down over it, he wrote the words, "*Quand on vous voit, on vous aime—Quand on vous aime, ou vous voit-on?*" and he pushed it across the round table.

He looked at her imploringly, insistently. Outside the voices came nearer; and one of the doors open to

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the path was suddenly blocked by the sturdy figure of the Baroness Karff. She looked rather quickly from Francis Domville to the young lady standing opposite to him.

"I was just about to tell Mr. Domville," said the Countess Sabine, composedly, "that this is my favourite retreat,"—and, as Domville's light grey eyes filled with gratitude, she added, with a smile no English girl versed in that art of flirtation Sabine so much disdained need have disowned,—"and how fond we are of sitting here together."

As she spoke she opened the drawer, and quietly slipped the slate face downwards where it had lain so long waiting to play its part in the lives of Domville and Sabine.

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CHAPTER XIV

Nay, but the maddest gambler throws his heart.

ONE whose analysis of the human heart was ever penetratingly direct has declared that "a man brings to love a deal of ready-made sentiment, and even from childhood obscurely prognosticates the symptoms of this vital malady." The words Francis Domville had addressed to Sabine when they found themselves in the hall of Gaynesford Manor, standing apart from Father Copley and the Baroness Karff, embodied to a peculiar degree the truth of this analysis. For in his imagination the woman whose name he believed to be Sabine Reiffersberg was henceforth always seen against that background which held for Domville every cherished memory of early youth, as well as his never uttered, though none the less potent, pride of place, pride of birth, and, far nobler, pride of faith.

Wherever their second meeting had taken place there would still have been present that sense of beckoning affinity which is perhaps the greatest mystery connected with the amazing riddle of sex, but with such a man as Francis Domville the environment in which he saw the beloved,—the spiritual atmosphere in which he felt her to be surrounded, was bound to affect the quality of the feeling instinct led him to bestow. Sabine at Gaynesford; Sabine seen, as he was destined to see her, in a rather singular solitariness, satisfied his secret ideal of what the woman destined to become Mrs. Domville of Gaynesford should be.

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So it was that there followed on that second meeting a sequence of enchanted days, none the less enchanted because of the vague, intangible mystery with which Domville felt the Baroness Karff's ward to be surrounded. He assumed almost at once, with the evident though unspoken approval of the Baroness, the position of attentive host to both the elder and the younger lady, and so cordial and intimate did his relations with his tenant soon become, that she pressed him to make use, when in the manor-house, of a library which had always been used by his own father as the estate room.

He soon found, however, that among the privileges this position brought with it was not that of ever seeing either of his guests without the other. The Baroness spoke to him but little, and she seemed to have no wish to absorb any of his attention; but, on the other hand, she and her grey worsted knitting, her silent, listening presence, and the metallic click of the long gold needles with the help of which her homely work grew under her fingers, were always in attendance on her ward.

From early morning onwards,—from the conclusion of the daily Mass said in the private chapel, Francis Domville and the Countess Sabine were constantly together,—together but never alone, never face to face as they had been in their first brief interview in the pavilion at Hague House, and scarcely ever as much out of earshot of the Baroness as on the day when Domville first saw Sabine in her habit as she lived, sitting in the great hall at Gaynesford Manor, her fair head bent over her embroidery frame.

Domville had penetrated, far more than often falls to the lot of a young Englishman of his generation, into the jealously-guarded family life of the French Legitimist families. The fact that there had been in

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the eighteenth, and even in the seventeenth centuries, several marriages between the Domvilles of Gaynesford and members of the French noblesse, formed a still strong and real tie between himself and certain Norman and Breton families; but in no old-world château had Domville ever been made so vividly aware, as he was now made aware, of the barrier which continental custom sets up between the bachelor and the unmarried girl.

The attitude of the Baroness Karff was the more disconcerting inasmuch as, though she never allowed Domville to be for a moment alone with her ward, he was disagreeably conscious that she regarded any relation between himself and the Countess Sabine, other than that of mere acquaintance, as out of the question. He was even inclined to believe that he had at first been mistaken in his theory as to the Baroness's nationality; no Englishwoman, or so, as time went on, Domville became convinced, could have proved herself at once so vigilant and at the same time so composed and unruffled a chaperon.

He sometimes smiled a little ruefully to think how greatly mistaken he had been in his theory concerning the lady of the pavilion,—she had seemed to him when he had first seen her rather more mistress of her life and conduct than are most women; but now he knew that the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg was curiously, nay touchingly, submissive to her guardian, and it was clear that some very strong bond of affection and of mutual respect bound them the one to the other.

Again and again Domville noticed that the Baroness Karff attached great importance to every fleeting wish or half-expressed desire of her ward,—this only, however, when such a wish or desire in no way ran counter to her views of what propriety demands of its votaries. Thus, on one occasion she laid what Domville regarded

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as an utterly unreasonable embargo on a suggestion made by him which had apparently much pleased the Countess Sabine. He discovered that when at home she spent much time on horseback, but when he eagerly suggested that they should ride together, the Baroness treated the notion as one too unreasonable to be worth discussion, and he had found, then as always, that when his will and that of her guardian clashed, Sabine expected him to give way at once without discussion.

As time went on, it piqued him to feel how little the constant surveillance to which they were both subject seemed to weigh on his companion, and yet—yet Domville would not have wished Sabine other than she was. Her view of life,—that of an impulsive girl to whom the world of romance is more vivid than the prosaic happenings of to-day,—her belief in the goodness, the generosity, the mansuetude of human nature, not only amused Francis Domville, but touched him to tenderness. But when they were apart, there would come to him, bringing with it a touch of uneasy chill and suspicion, a memory of the first words he had ever heard her utter,—those which had rung out in the darkness at Hague House; they had been bitter words, making stilted but none the less real allusion to some treachery from which she had suffered,—then, later, had come that not very maidenly question she had put to him in the character of Marie Antoinette addressing Fersen's ghost.

But these shadows,—these half-formed suspicions that Sabine's short life already held some tragedy which, for the moment, she had banished from her mind, proved only transitory. And so, as each of the long summer days slipped by, and went to join its fellows on the tablets of Domville's emotional memory, he felt as if he and this dear stranger were happy wayfarers, making

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their way to a paradise to the gates of which they two only held the key.

Perhaps because he was no longer lad to her girl,—no longer filled with a youthful belief that the next stage must surely bring with it a greater ecstasy than does the present, he was content to linger on the way yet a little while longer; and when at last there came the unlooked-for moment,—nay the long hour,—when Domville might have spoken to Sabine of love, he allowed the opportunity to pass him by, restrained by some obscure feeling of what many in his place would have regarded as an excessive delicacy.

This neglected opportunity came about in very simple wise. The Baroness Karff sat up one night much later than was her wont inditing long letters, couched in incorrect but vigorous German, to certain of her henchmen in the far away little principality of which she was the virtual ruler, and where there had arisen one of those trifling incidents which sometimes cause greater trouble to adjust than do graver matters. Not having gone to rest till after dawn, she had slept heavily on,—long after her precious charge had got up and gone down to Mass.

In the chapel Domville at once missed the too familiar figure, and as a consequence had much ado to prevent his thoughts from wandering unduly from his devotions,—devotions which had acquired a deeper, a more intimately personal, significance since his stay at Gaynesford and his acquaintanceship with Sabine.

To Francis Domville his religion was what patriotism has become to the average civilized man,—a sentiment so completely a part of himself as to be in no need of either explanation or discussion; but, just as the patriot in times of peace gives but little thought to the question of armaments, so Domville had too easily contented himself with the barest observance of the law. But

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now,—now, when he found himself each morning in the chapel which he had believed to have as surely disappeared as has a building on the site of which another house has been set up,—when he saw before him the kneeling figure of the woman he loved, his thoughts always went back to the days when he was a child steeped in the Catholic traditions of his house; and it was the child in him whose lips to-day formed a very fervent word of thanks to his own patron saint, Francis of Assisi, who, ever the most human of the blest, no doubt in answer to that benison, prolonged the Baroness's slumbers.

For when Domville and Sabine passed through the curtains which separated the chapel from the other half of the long gallery, they found no vigilant guardian awaiting them on the other side; and yet, as they turned and faced each other, the Baroness's unseen presence so far affected those over whom she exercised so constant a watchfulness, that each felt as if this dual solitude held something of that dangerous sweetness which is said only to accompany the eating of forbidden fruit.

For a moment they stood in the golden sunshine at the head of the broad gleaming stairs which link the long gallery at Gaynesford with the antechamber to the hall below; then Domville, greatly daring, and taking as his excuse the Baroness Karff's watchfulness lest her ward should run the slightest risk of physical hurt, grasped Sabine's right hand in his left, and led her very carefully and quite silently down the slippery steps; but when their feet left the last stair, he quickly dropped the hand he had held in so firm and possessive a grasp, and, still without any word, allowed her to precede him through the door which led into the hall.

In a voice which seemed to himself to betray,—to cry aloud his delight in being at last with her alone, he said, "Shall we go out of doors, to the gardens?"—and

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as Sabine, with a quick shy glance at his eager face bent her head and smiled, he knew that his heart was beating fast, and for a moment he felt almost afraid of her power over him.

And then, as she came and went about the great room, each of her most trifling movements was invested in Francis Domville's eyes with a peculiar secret significance. When she took off the veil she had worn in the chapel,—when she was seeking for the red sunshade without which her guardian never allowed her to go out, even in the early morning sun; hope—nay more, triumphant certainty—whispered in Domville's ear, "She is doing now what she will do on every fine summer morning for years to come, but then,"—and the thought brought with it rapture,—"there will be none of this haste,—none of this feeling that your happy moments are numbered,—for on those summer mornings you and she will be here alone—alone together, with no Baroness Karff hovering ever in the background to spoil your joy in each other's company!"

Still, even the tantalizing present was not lacking in joy. They walked out, side by side, through the wide door opening on to the terrace, but when they came to the walled gardens, a strange delicious shyness fell on them both, and they began to speak of indifferent things, such as the Baroness might well have listened to with indulgent approval had she been pacing slowly behind them in her usual fashion. But because she was not there, each word they said, especially those spoken by Sabine, seemed to be fraught with a meaning which made the man turn pale and the girl redden. And yet they felt as if they could not use this new-found liberty; the cage doors were only ajar,—not yet widely open on the free solitude for which each longed.

When they were close to the summer-house where Domville had written on his sister's slate the words

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which now seemed to him so inadequate as to be almost impertinent in their baldness of expression, they turned aside to the sundial which stood on the strip of grass to the right of the little building. In the bright sunshine they together, for the first time, made out the hour; it was very early, only eight o'clock, and Domville with a shock of happy relief realized that he might yet hope to be alone with her for some time longer. Together they spelt out the strange, the enigmatic motto, which had been cut deeply into the old dial's plinth: "*Can he but find it, there is an hour wherein a man may be happy all his life.*"

Had the Baroness Karff been standing by, there would now have come from her a proposal concerning one of the outdoor games which she had early encouraged their playing together, and which, to Domville's surprise, possessed for the young Countess the pleasure of complete novelty. But now he and she were both engaged in playing the greatest of human games,—that of which Sabine's guardian had apparently so little knowledge.

They left the gardens, and, crossing the long grass alley where the Domvilles of penal days had spent long hours in rolling bowls, while their contemporaries were fighting for King and country or taking a more peaceful part in the affairs of the nation, Sabine and Francis Domville stepped from sunshine into shade. Still walking abreast, they slowly made their way under the trees till they came to an open space containing what had once been a formal rose-garden planned by Domville's mother when she had first come to Gaynesford as a bride.

The spot had been ill chosen for its purpose, and for some years past the rosery had been left untended; it was now such a tangle of briar and blossom as surrounded the Sleeping Beauty. Yet, perhaps because it

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was an exceptionally hot summer, the still, shady spot was full of scent and vivid colouring. Indeed, this very morning roses were being cut in great sheafs by the head gardener, a Scot named Donaldson who had now been at Gaynesford just forty years, and who in his youth had helped to lay out and plant this very garden.

The two drew near to him, and talked to the rose-gatherer, whose eyes were so holden to the enchantment now about him, that Domville, only half listening to his gnarled slow utterances, suddenly became aware that the old man was cautiously suggesting the banishment of all this loveliness,—the turfing over of the very path on which Sabine now stood embowered. "No, no!" exclaimed his master, "we won't think of such a thing, Donaldson! Why, it would be sacrilege! Instead of doing away with this garden, I want you—we want you"—he turned to Sabine—"to plant more roses,—roses that do not need the sun."

And Donaldson, looking up at the young man with the eyes that seemed to see so little of the beauty about him, yet saw quite enough to show him that soon he would have another mistress, but not—or so he judged by her silence, and by her abstracted, glowing air—one of those fine madams, products of a degenerate day, who seem to believe that they can teach an old gardener —even a Scots gardener—far more about his work than he has learnt himself in a lifetime.

At last they turned and left this oasis of beauty, and, as they walked a moment later from under the green leafy canopy into the glistening morning sunshine, each saw with a pang that their hour was over—

The Baroness was hurrying towards them with a perturbed, troubled expression, and when they came up to her, Domville noticed that she looked very unlike her composed watchful self, and that she must have walked more quickly than was wise during her search for the

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truants. But she said no word of rebuke, or even of surprise, and the three again fell into the same at once distant and intimate relations which two of the three so closely linked together found more and more tantalizing and unnatural as the days went by.

But that hour of wasted opportunity,—if indeed it were wasted,—marked a change, not so much in Domville's relation to Sabine, as in the attitude of the Baroness Karff to himself. After that morning, the Baroness watched him far more narrowly than she had yet done; and whereas before she had contented herself with simply acting as Sabine's shadow, she now subjected both her ward and Domville to what he divined to be a series of experiments which had for object that of finding out on what exact terms they were the one to the other. Her small bright eyes would follow them with a shrewd calculating glance,—and sometimes Domville thought he detected a satirical smile hovering over the thin, tightly-closed lips. Her presence disturbed him more and more. She was the serpent in his Eden; he felt her to be instinct with the spirit of disillusion,—to be no friend of love, of that passion to which she was now so near a neighbour. And so, with the fleeting days, —the hours,—each of which brought him their full measure of tantalizing joys and breathless longings, there grew a deep dislike of the woman whose personality—whose very voice—haunted him with an unquiet sense of old knowledge and familiarity.

Then came another and a very different phase,—one which caused Domville to feel as if Sabine's guardian were treating him as an accomplice. It was in such a mood, when Sabine for a moment was standing apart from them, that the Baroness suddenly exclaimed: "Gaynesford has worked wonders, Mr. Domville! My ward is more lovely,—more blooming, than she was,

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even before her illness. This place suits her,—would that we could stay on here a little longer!" And when Domville instantly rejoined with the eager words, "Why should you not stay for the whole summer?" she had answered in her toneless, measured voice, and with her inscrutable smile which was so devoid of mirth, "That is impossible, there are reasons—" Then Sabine had come within earshot, and the Baroness had stopped speaking, while Domville told himself that the time was near at hand when he must provoke an explanation, —extort from her the truth.

The truth? Francis Domville thought he knew the truth,—that it was not, indeed, very far to seek. There was—there must be—an ugly, perhaps a sordid, story connected with Sabine's birth. How else account for the abnormal and solitary life she had apparently led, —for the reticence with which she, naturally frank and impulsive, surrounded all her own personal history. She had sometimes made brief, tender allusion to her orphan state—to the young father and mother whom she had never really known; but Domville, while in no doubt as to her sincerity, thought he recognized there nothing but the fruits of the Baroness Karff's crafty imagination. He had been inexpressibly relieved when on one occasion the older lady had used words which left no doubt that there was between herself and Sabine no tie of blood relationship.

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CHAPTER XV

En paroles comme en actions, être discret, c'est s'abstenir.

THE break in this tantalizing sequence of enchanted days came in a guise which would never have suggested itself to Domville's imagination.

Father Copley left Gaynesford for a few days, and his absence rendered fewer and more formal the meetings between Domville and Sabine. For with the priest's departure came the cessation of daily Mass in the private chapel of the manor-house, and this meant that Domville had no excuse for disturbing the two ladies during the early hours of the day. The only occasion he had done this,—for on the second morning of Father Copley's absence he had walked down and made his way to the business room set aside for his use,—the Baroness had taken particular care that both she and her ward should be invisible.

True, Domville, for the first time since the room had been placed at his disposal, had got through some real work, and when lunch was served to him the Baroness had appeared and exchanged a few words with the man who was in the peculiar position of being at once her landlord and her guest; while the afternoon had sped by as had sped every afternoon,—he had spent long sunny hours in Sabine's company; but the young man had not cared to repeat next morning the first half of the experiment.

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Annoyances, no less than real troubles, seldom come singly, and Domville had just received a letter from Paul Feyghine containing an appeal which he felt himself unable to disregard. The Grand Duke Paul, —the old man whom he had seen for a moment in his aunt's drawing-room some five weeks before,—who was, it seems, spending his time between England and France, superintending the purchase of vast war material, had suddenly expressed a wish to know the famous dancer, Joaquina Nuñez. Some meddling fool, so Feyghine expressed it to his cousin, had suggested that Joaquina should give a supper party in honour of the Grand Duke, and his Highness had graciously, nay eagerly, accepted. Feyghine evidently suspected that his Imperial godfather was aware of his connection with the dancer; in any case, he was determined not to act as host at the supper, and in his letter he begged his cousin most urgently to take his place. As is so often the case in matters which touch the intimate relations of men and women, Domville perceived that there was underlying this request a further and an unspoken reason. If he did not take Feyghine's place, another man,—one for whom Joaquina's Russian lover had long felt a violent unreasoning jealousy,—would play the part of host.

There was one meagre consolation,—a week ago it would have irked Domville far more than it would now to leave Gaynesford even for a few hours. This supper party was to take place the very next evening, when Father Copley would still be absent from Gaynesford, and, as long as the priest was away, the Baroness Karff seemed determined to keep Domville on the footing of a distant acquaintance, rather than on that of a close friend which she had gradually allowed him to assume.

It was now the third morning of Father Copley's absence. Domville and Mitroff had not long finished

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the frugal breakfast provided for them by Father Copley's housekeeper. The Russian was already writing busily in his own room; and Domville, having just lit his pipe, was standing in the porch of the presbytery, when suddenly he became aware that the Baroness Karff was walking up the path which led from the main route through Gaynesford Park to the priest's house. With a feeling of surprise and uneasiness, he realized that this was the first time he had ever seen his tenant really apart from the younger woman to whom she seemed to stand in so peculiar a relation.

For a few moments he was able to watch her without being himself seen; and again he was perplexed by a sensation that there was something about her personality with which he had long been familiar. The trifling fact that she had for once laid aside the knitting with which her hands were so generally engaged, added to instead of detracting from Domville's suspicion that he had seen her before, or—and now he was very near the truth—that she bore an extraordinary resemblance to some person whom he saw often and whom he knew extremely well.

Knocking his pipe against the side of the porch, he walked forward to meet the plain, elderly woman whom he had felt, ever since he first met her, to be both mysterious and formidable. As they met and stood for a moment on the path, just out of earshot of the priest's house, the Baroness uttered a slight exclamation of pleasure. "I have come to thank you," she said in her cold, toneless voice, "for so generously treating me as your guest,—I received back this morning, not only my second cheque to the Messrs. Plumbe, but also the amount for which the first cheque was made out. I accept your hospitality in the spirit in which you have offered it, and so it is to my host that I have come this morning,"—she hesitated and then added quickly, "for I am much in need of advice."

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Domville muttered some awkward and civil word of answer; the rather sharp correspondence which had taken place between himself and his solicitors concerning his determination to lend,—not to let,—the Baroness Karff his country-house, had happened within the first few days of his arrival at Gaynesford, and had of late slipped his memory. He had known nothing of what business arrangements had been made concerning the payment of the rent, and he had supposed that the Baroness would not learn of what she rather pompously styled his generosity till the end of her tenancy.

"The Countess Sabine Reiffersberg," she added graciously, "will also be gratified by this evidence of your handsome conduct."

"Pray do not say anything to her about it!" exclaimed Domville hastily; "I feel sure, Baroness, that you and I are not strangers to one another. The fact that you knew Gaynesford Manor and stayed here as a girl—I think you told Mr. Plumbe that that was the case—has emboldened me to treat you as a friend." He added with a touch of embarrassment, "and then there has also been your kindness in allowing me to use the estate-room; it has enabled me to transact a great deal of necessary business."

"I am glad indeed to hear that," she said mildly; "you must be a very quick worker." Domville bit his lip. He was acutely conscious that, till the morning following Father Copley's departure, he had never spent more than a few consecutive minutes in the room to which he had made reference; but the Baroness was looking up at him with a bland, inquiring gaze, wholly devoid of sarcasm.

Her next words startled and dismayed him considerably: "I have left my ward upstairs, in her own apartments. She has been much distressed,—in fact made once more almost as ill as she was before we came here,

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—owing to some information which only reached us last night."

The Baroness stopped abruptly, and when she next opened her lips, Domville noted a curious change in her manner of speaking; she brought out her words slowly as if weighing each sentence, and her voice sank almost to a whisper: "We have reason to believe that a gentleman who has given us a great deal of trouble in the past, and whom we came to England to avoid, has discovered our retreat."

While speaking, she had kept her eyes fixed on the ground, but now she looked up, as if expecting Domville to make some comment; but he remained silent, and so she again lowered her eyes and went on: "We learn that he intends to come here to-morrow afternoon, and, should he fail in seeing my ward, he will probably seek to establish himself in the neighbourhood. Under the circumstances we have two courses open to us,—we can leave Gaynesford, or I can arrange for this gentleman to be received and informed that his efforts to see the Countess are vain, as she is in fact determined never to see him again."

Domville's hand tightened on the stick he was holding till the hard wood almost bruised his palm; he felt as if the enchanted world in which he had now been living for so many days, and of which he had grown so well contented a denizen, had become in a moment seamed with pitfalls and overcast with deep shadows. In vain he reminded himself that he had always known there must be some such story in the background of Sabine's life,—so much her own incautious words in the pavilion had indicated,—but this definite confirmation of what had been the vaguest of suppositions hurt him shrewdly.

"I suppose," he said at last, "that this man regards himself as having a claim on—on your ward?"

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"He has no kind of claim!" exclaimed the Baroness, with a certain vehemence. "Would that I could be frank with you, Mr. Domville, concerning the affair! But, for reasons into which I cannot enter, my ward has always been particularly anxious that it should not be discussed with you,"—she stole a furtive look at the face of the man by her side, but his set expression told her nothing of what he was feeling,—"You may, however, take it from me that he is not worthy of any sympathy! His conduct has been infamous! And now, just when she seemed to be completely forgetting all about him and the trouble he has caused her, we have news sent us that he is coming here!"

"But surely," exclaimed Domville, "you are not compelled to receive this man? Orders can be given at once at the various lodges, and you, I presume, can trust your servants to refuse him admittance to the house?"

"That is exactly what I cannot do," observed the Baroness reluctantly, "for it is only too clear that one of my people must be in his pay, otherwise he could not have known that we were here,—I mean at Gaynesford, —every possible precaution has been taken by me to conceal the fact."

"But how do you know he intends coming to-morrow?" asked Domville with a touch of sharp curiosity.

"We remain in close touch with his movements"—the speaker gave a little uneasy cough—"through his valet, a most trustworthy man, who keeps me informed of all his intentions."

A feeling of strong disgust came over Domville, and the repulsion which he had so often felt for the Baroness Karff became intensified a thousandfold. It was with reluctance that he forced himself to listen to her next words. "He has discovered," sh went on, "all about our daily habits. He regards the Countess as a child,

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and he hopes to surprise her when she is alone and make an appeal to her pity—"

"He will find it difficult to catch her alone," thought Domville, with a touch of grim humour, "unless he is cleverer than I take him to be!" "I presume," he said aloud, "that this gentleman regards himself as entitled to an interview with the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg?"

Something in his tone angered the Baroness. "But he is not entitled to anything of the kind. She detests him! The very thought of him is abhorrent to her! He has positive proof of how she regards him——"

During their conversation they had been walking on, hardly seeing where their steps were taking them. Now they had reached the road which led through the park; suddenly the Baroness turned and fixed her small bright eyes with an appealing look on her companion's face. "And now, Mr. Domville, I ask if you, in the character of my own and my ward's host, will consent to receive this gentleman? If Father Copley were here, I should ask him to do so. Listen! Not an hour ago the poor child said to me, 'Oh, that I had a father or a brother who would make him understand the truth!'"

Domville glanced doubtfully at the Baroness. The few words she had just repeated had on him exactly the effect she intended them to have,—that is, they moved him, and excited his sharp, jealous anger; and yet he was perplexed, as well as surprised, by the Baroness Karff's request that he would see this man whose coming so deeply perturbed her. There were certain questions which he must force her to answer before he could make up his mind what to do. "I suppose I may assume," he observed with as great an indifference as he could muster, "that this gentleman was once an accepted lover of the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg?"

"Your perspicacity is not at fault," replied the Baroness, speaking very quickly. "It was one of those

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arranged marriages which so often take place on the Continent. He and my ward only met some four or five times; she had no father, no brother to watch over her true interests, and I—a poor weak woman—could do nothing! I was overruled, though one glance at his depraved face was enough for me,—the matter was taken out of my hands; I was told that my objections were of no account!" She stopped to take breath, and Domville, looking down at her, saw that the face which generally wore so impassive and secretive an expression was convulsed with feeling—

"The very people who were so eager to arrange the marriage," she continued more calmly, "are now sorry that they disregarded my advice. I beg you to believe me"—and, putting out her hand, she laid it on Domville's arm—"when I say that it has been my earnest desire to take you into our confidence about this matter, but she, the Countess, has not allowed it. On the first evening of our arrival at Gaynesford, she made me promise by my love for her that you should know nothing."

"And is she willing that I should be told all this now?" asked Domville slowly. "Before consenting to do this that you propose, I should like to be quite sure that your ward approves of the suggestion."

"I beg of you," exclaimed the Baroness, "to trust me in this matter, and to put yourself in my hands! Surely you know,—it is impossible that you have not seen with what confidence she regards me! I could not love her more,—I might not love her as much,—if she were indeed my own child. I repeat that it is no fault of mine that you do not know all the circumstances which led to our coming here. Very soon you will learn everything, and then you will know that my whole life has been spent in her service. I watched over her, guarded her, made her life happy as a dream,—till this man was thrust across

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her path by others. Since then I have defended her and rescued her from beginning a life which would have been to such a one as herself far worse than death."

The Baroness turned away; she was ashamed of her emotion, but Domville, for the first time, felt moved to something akin to liking for her.

"Very well," he said, shortly, "I will do what you have asked me to do. But, Baroness," he went on, "I'm not inclined to be a party to any trick,—I won't, for instance, allow the man to be informed that he is to be shown into the presence of your ward only to find me there instead! Before I would do anything of that kind, I should require a direct mandate from her—"

"You can leave all that to me," said the Baroness confidently; she had recovered her composure, and was again speaking in the quiet, colourless voice which had seemed, until this last hour, part of her identity,—"I propose, with your permission, to send my servants away for the day, and to instal in their place Patrick Blake,"—noting an expression of surprise on Domville's face, she added quickly, "—at the time I used to visit your parents, Blake was your father's butler, and an excellent servant; I was pleased to hear from Father Copley that he was living in the village. Blake will be delighted to resume his old duties for a few hours. But I propose to see you again, some time to-morrow, before the interview takes place. And, Mr. Domville, I feel sure you will pardon me for saying that you had better not come to see us to-day. My ward is really ill——"

Again Domville felt the old feeling of distrust sweep over him: again he felt that the Baroness Karff dominated the situation, and that he was but a pawn—though a rather important pawn—in the game which she was playing. . . .

She bade him a curt farewell, and as he stood and watched her walking away towards the manor-house,

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two things suddenly became clear to him,—one was that he had not been told the name, or even the nationality, of the man who could look back to having been Sabine's accepted lover; and the other was that he was now himself shaken and possessed by a fierce, instinctive jealousy, transmuting the ideal passion with which it had pleased him to regard her into a far more human and primitive feeling.

As the Baroness Karff made her way slowly back to the manor-house, the outcome of the interview left her both perplexed and doubtful. There come moments in every human being's life when a process of mental stock-taking must perforce be gone through,—and one such moment had now come to her.

She felt less clear as to her future course than she had done even at the height of the struggle which had taken place immediately after the marriage ceremony of Don Diego and the Margravine of Moravia; for certain human forces of which she had never had occasion to feel the strength were acting powerfully, and to her very unexpectedly, on the high-spirited, romantic girl who, wilful and even imperious to others, had always been, when it came to the point, submissive to, and dominated by, herself.

The Baroness Karff had owed a considerable part of her success in life to her power of making quick decisions, and of forming plans well within her scope of achievement; even now she had evolved a scheme by which the interests of all concerned, those of the Margravine, of Domville, and last but not least of herself, should be studied and conciliated. The scheme unfortunately depended for its success on the full co-operation of Francis Domville; and though, when he was not present, she felt confident that he would play the part she had assigned to him, she realized, when they were

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actually face to face, that he might prove less pliable, less malleable.

When she came at last within sight of Gaynesford Manor, she stopped and looked consideringly at the stately mass of building before her, and its austere splendour gave her a curious thrill of personal pride. The owner of this place was no inconsiderable personage; now spread out before her, gleaming rose-red in the morning sun, was the justification of the scheme which was taking such matured shape in her mind.

The Baroness Karff had little reason to love Gaynesford. Her youth there had been full of humiliation; and it was not till she had left it that she had been able to lift the load of vicarious disgrace which had rested on her,—not till she had severed all outward connection with her birthplace had she succeeded, and that in spite of the greatest of feminine disabilities, physical ugliness, in making for herself a far more important place in the world than had been attained by any of the true born daughters of the great house at which she was now looking with such kindly, wistful eyes.

And yet, little as the Baroness had reason to love Gaynesford, when once more in England her whole mind had been set on coming back there, no longer unrecognized and shunned, but in the character of a great lady able to afford herself a costly folly. It was characteristic of the woman that she had arranged to pay out of her own little income and savings the fancy rent with which she had tried to tempt Francis Domville into letting her the place; on the other hand, it was equally typical of her nature that she had been agreeably surprised by Domville's refusal to treat her and her supposed ward on any other footing than that of his guests.

Francis Domville himself was not,—could not be,—to the Baroness Karff like any other young Englishman thrown across her path by chance. From the first

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moment when she had seen him standing at the foot of the movable staircase which gave external access to the private chapel, he had taken a unique place in her imagination,—almost, it might be said, in her heart. During her solitary childhood and youth she had hardly known that there existed in the world, with the positive exceptions of Queen Victoria and the Pope, a greater personage than Domville of Gaynesford. First her father, and then the half-brother who had treated her with such signal generosity, had been monarchs of that not inconsiderable kingdom, and something of the old feeling still dominated her. This had blinded her, as she now ruefully admitted to herself, to the possible consequences of the intimacy which she had tacitly allowed, if not exactly encouraged, between Francis Domville and Sabine.

And now, as the result of this, the Baroness found herself in a situation out of which it would take all her science to find an issue. She was not a tender or an imaginative woman, but she shrank from the memory of what the Don Diego episode had cost the Margravine, and she was determined to secure for the one human being she had ever really loved at least a measure of that happiness for which all women instinctively crave.

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CHAPTER XVI

" Et l'amour?"
" L'amour est un sentiment un peu passé de mode——."
" Mais digne de respect, et même de considération?"

" COOEY, I can never never forgive you!"

The Margravine was sitting up in the great bed which held a significant and awful memory for the woman to whom she was speaking. Even now, the Baroness Karff, turning round in answer to the passionate words, seemed to see, looming before her in the dim evening light, not the slender girlish figure which she knew was there, but the broad, stiffly propped-up form of that Francis Domville who had been her father,—and in the place of the Margravine's pale, quivering face, framed in its aureole of fair hair, she saw the grey head of an old dying man fallen forward on his breast. So vivid, so painful was the half-hallucination that the Baroness quickly looked away again, and stared once more out of the window which gave on to the vast expanse of turf now looking grey in the bright moonlight; it was Sabine's fancy to have this window left unshuttered, and in the deep embrasure was placed the prie-dieu at which she knelt to say her prayers every night and morning.

The Baroness Karff suffered from none of the ills to which modern woman is heir, but to-night she felt strangely nervous, and quite unlike her dry calm self. The words which she had just heard indicated that she

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had made a serious miscalculation regarding the character—or was it the nature?—she believed herself to have formed. There had risen sudden storms in the early days of Sabine's girlhood; but the Baroness had always known how to emerge triumphant from every such ordeal, and that so cleverly, that each successive struggle had resulted in consolidating her position. Once only had she been worsted, for in the question of her mistress's marriage the Baroness Karff had to own herself outwitted and defeated, but even then Fate had come to her rescue in an almost miraculous manner.

To-night, the sudden conflict of will between herself and Sabine found her unprepared. She had meant to wait till the morning before telling the Margravine of Domville's coming interview with Don Diego, and then to have extorted from Sabine an assent to his being told before that interview as much of the truth as it suited the teller,—that is the Baroness herself,—that he should hear. But a chance question and an imprudent answer, coming at the end of a long and uneasy day, had caused the Margravine to stumble on the truth so sedulously guarded from her. Only by repeating the actual substance of her conversation with Domville,—only by admitting what she had finally decided as to the reception of the morrow's dreaded visitor, had the Baroness been able to quiet her mistress's conviction that she was being deceived.

The woman, however clever, from whom the magic world of passion has always been hidden, is bound to make very serious mistakes when dealing with the young and ardent, for she is then liable to be at any moment confronted with a motive force, the strength of which she has no means of gauging. The greater her knowledge of life, the more irremediable are likely to be her mistakes in a realm of which a theoretical

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knowledge is more misleading than would be complete ignorance.

While their discussion was actually taking place, the Baroness Karff had been reassured by the quiet way in which Sabine had received her hesitating utterances; then, quite suddenly, had been flung out the cry provoked by instinctive, unreasoning, feminine disgust at this proposed meeting of the two men who had each a claim on her,—in the one case a claim only too tangible, in the other as yet unformulated, but ah! how readily acknowledged by her own heart.

"Cooey, I can never never forgive you!"

The Baroness Karff was aware that hard words break no bones. The homely English proverb was often quoted by her, and had ever proved comfortable when she was engaged in one of the hardly-won battles in which her spirit delighted; but now hard words, uttered in the soft voice that was so dear to her, hurt far more than blows would have done from another quarter.

"When I have been engaged in doing what I thought was for your good," she said coldly, "I have never considered the question of your forgiveness as affecting the matter. You ask why I did not consult you before going to see Mr. Domville? In my judgment, dear child, you were not in a state this morning to be spoken to on the subject. Mr. Domville is here more or less all day, and any chance might have brought him face to face with Don Diego,"—and as Sabine sitting up with her hands clasped together made a sudden movement of recoil, the Baroness very deliberately added, "Also I felt that the time has now come when Mr. Domville should know the truth,—but for my promise I should have told him to-day."

"And are you sure, Cooey, that you did not tell him,—are you telling me the truth now?" Sabine spoke in a very low voice; she was trembling, burning with shame

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and fear of what had been done,—of what might have been said to Francis Domville that morning.

The Baroness came and stood close to the great bed. She peered forward, and saw with concern that the Margravine's face was hidden in her hands. "I repeat to you, most solemnly, my beloved child, that Mr. Domville as yet knows nothing, but I again say that the time has come when he must learn the truth. This is an admirable opportunity, and once he knows who it is who has been honouring Gaynesford with her presence, he,—who is after all master here,—will deal with Don Diego far more effectually than I could do."

"Mr. Domville will never see Don Diego," — the words were uttered in a whisper, but the Baroness heard them only too clearly; and again she felt as if she were dealing with a human being in some way other than and different from the young creature with whose every thought she believed herself familiar, and whose unexpressed attraction for Francis Domville she had of late become convinced she could use to promote her own legitimate ambitions, as well as the Margravine's natural craving for romance.

"I desire that you tell Mr. Domville," continued the low, decided voice, "that the necessity for his seeing the —the person we are expecting has passed by. Listen, Cooey!—and do not speak till you have heard me out. I intend to receive Don Diego myself! I ought to have done so before,—it would have been far better for him to hear from my own lips what up to now I have been content to allow you and others to say for me. My feeling concerning Don Diego has changed,—I now see that you were right,—that I never loved him. I was a foolish romantic child, but now I am a woman, and I am sure that, when we are face to face, I shall be able to make him understand that the step I have taken will be quite as much to his interest as to mine."

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"If you receive Don Diego, and discuss with him your joint interests," answered the Baroness gravely, "you will, by the mere fact of doing so, recede from the position we have gained with such difficulty. The Curia will have the best of excuses for suspending its action. That will mean another long delay,—are you prepared to face that possibility?"

"I would infinitely rather that even that happened," passionately exclaimed the Margravine, "than that the situation, such as it is, should be discussed between Mr. Domville and Don Diego! As for your proposal to tell Mr. Domville to-morrow what you call the truth, I forbid you to do so, Cooey! I do not often interfere with your plans,—have you not always done with me and my life exactly what you wanted? But in this one matter I must trust to my own judgment. Mr. Domville should never have been brought into the matter."

The Baroness felt the rebuke,—the sharp reproof, contained in the young decided voice, and she felt keenly incensed. She remained silent for a few moments, and then, spurred on by a feeling in which unconscious jealousy of Domville was certainly a part, she deliberately decided to play the one card which, as she now reminded herself, had never failed in bringing the Margravine to her senses. It was, however, a card the Baroness Karff was far too clever a woman to be over-fond of playing.

She moved away from where she had been standing close to the side of the bed, and waited till she saw that her stillness was making the object of her experiment uneasy. Then she spoke,—and her words, though uttered in the state bedchamber of Gaynesford Manor, obliterated for the moment, both from her own mind and from that of her listener, not only the place, but also the country, in which they were now staying;

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for each at once felt transported back to the Austrian principality where their joint lives had been spent in the past, and where the Baroness wished them to be spent in the future.

"If your Highness insists on seeing Don Diego, I must be allowed to dissociate myself entirely from that which I am sure will be fraught with much graver consequences than your Highness now believes; and I shall be compelled to resign the post I now occupy."

The speaker, judging by precedent, believed that no direct answer would be vouchsafed to her rather pompous exordium; but she felt sure that night would bring good counsel, and that by the morning the Margravine, if still mentally rebellious, would have become outwardly resigned to what her faithful friend and servant felt convinced was the only wise course to pursue.

But again the Baroness found herself strangely at fault, for, as she stood patiently waiting the word of dismissal, she suddenly saw Sabine's white figure slip down from the bed, and a moment later two soft, round arms were flung round the older woman's withered neck, while there were whispered in her ear the words, "You must not try to frighten me to-night, Cooey! This is not a question of your dignity,—of a quarrel with our insufferable Grabowitz. This matter lies between us two, and I must have,—nay, you must give me,—my way. You must be patient with me, Cooey, and kind as my mother would have been kind to me—to-night,"—and then, as she felt herself clasped closely to the only faithful heart she knew, the young panting voice went on in questioning entreaty,—"Surely you understand that a meeting between those two would be agony to me?" And as there came no answer,—only a word of endearment, she added, more composedly, "You and I, Cooey, will receive Don Diego. But you

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must let me speak to him; I beg you to understand that I no longer care enough about him to be angry. Indeed, were it not wrong to do so, I should thank God for having allowed him to be so wicked! But for that, I should now be his wife, and I should never have come here,—to dear—to beloved Gaynesford!"

She sighed; the face pressed to the Baroness's bosom was covered with burning blushes, but Sabine's hands, in the warm summer air, were cold. She felt that in the shadowy moonlight which lay about them she could speak of many hidden things: "Do you know what I did to-day, Cooey? I took out the letters Papa wrote to Mamma before they were married. The last time I had read them was the night before—before you know what day. And then, after that terrible, that degrading day, I put them away. I meant to burn them—but oh! how glad I am now that I did not follow that bad impulse, for to-day I thought — I wonder, Cooey, if you will think me very absurd, very fanciful?—I could not help thinking, heart's dearest, that they were such letters as Mr. Domville might write to one he loved—"

The Margravine did not wait for any answer; the words had scarcely left her lips before she had gently loosened herself from her companion's arms. She walked quickly across to the open window, and there knelt for a moment on the prie-dieu, gazing out intently till she saw, far away across the silvery grey grass, the slowly moving figure for which her eyes had been seeking; then she rose, and came once more close to her silent and now perplexed companion.

"Cooey," she said resolutely, "you must help me to dress, for we are going out to-night, to tell Mr. Domville of my decision. We shall not have far to go, for each evening he walks up and down——" she took the Baroness's unwilling hand and led her to the window:

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"Do you not see him? There, across the great meadow! Sometimes the priest is with him, but to-night he is alone."

As she spoke the Margravine pushed the tall shutters together, and with eager hands—hands unaccustomed to render even such trifling services to their owner as this—she lighted the candles on the dressing-table, and, during the moments that followed, while the Baroness Karff obeyed her mistress's behest in silence, Sabine went on speaking rapidly,—excitedly,—anxious perhaps to justify her own action to herself:

"We shall not detain him many moments, Cooey. I've made up my mind what to say to him, and from what you told him this morning,"—her voice became troubled and rather tremulous,—"I am sure he will understand."

"Nay, there you are mistaken," observed the Baroness drily. "Mr. Domville will certainly be mortified at your lack of confidence in him."

Domville, pacing up and down the path which bounded the great meadow-like expanse spread out before the long, irregular front of Gaynesford Manor, was in a restless and most unhappy mood. The communication made to him that morning had aroused both his curiosity and his jealousy to an intolerable pitch; and he would have given much to know how far the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg was aware of what had been arranged on her behalf by the masterful woman who, whatever her real relation to her ward, seemed to have her so completely in her power.

The more he thought over his conversation with the Baroness,—and he had thought of little else during that long idle day,—the more he suspected that she was keeping back from him some essential point of the story she had told him. Was it conceivable that any man,

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other than a once much-favoured lover, should be as persistent as this man who was coming there to-morrow was described as being? The thought that this stranger might have a hold on Sabine,—that she might have played with him the part she had played, nay was even now playing, with himself,—was intolerable.

Then Domville's thoughts turned wholly to the Baroness Karff. He reminded himself of how little he knew, even now, of the woman whose conduct, when she had been engaged in the negotiations with his solicitors, had been mysterious and eccentric to a most uncalled-for degree; she had to-day confessed that Gaynesford had been familiar to her in her youth, but she had added none of the details that she might naturally have been expected to add when talking to the son of those whom she claimed as old friends.

And yet, little as he knew of the Baroness, Domville had ruefully to admit that he knew even less of her ward; but, whereas his mind was full of doubt and uneasy suspicion concerning the older woman, he found it impossible to harbour any cruel thought against Sabine; and he told himself that at the most she had been perhaps foolish, imprudent, in her dealings with this man who was to receive his final dismissal to-morrow.

As he stood with bent head thinking these unprofitable thoughts, at the junction of the two paths of which the one led to the presbytery, and the other straight on to one of the doors opening out of the great hall of Gaynesford Manor, Domville suddenly heard a voice utter his name,—and looking up he saw to his extreme amazement the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg coming towards him with quick firm steps. She was already more than half way down the path leading from the house to that on which he was now standing, and the moon, sailing high across the sky, streamed down on

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her tall, white-gowned figure. As he walked forward to meet her, Domville saw that there was something unusual and constrained in the way she held herself; her hands were clasped behind her, her head thrown back, and, for the first time since they had met at Gaynesford, something about her appearance strongly reminded him of when he had first seen her. The likeness to Marie Antoinette,—to the pathetic, enigmatic figure for whom Sabine cherished so romantic a cult,—was also emphasized by the way in which her fair hair was now dressed, for it was loosely arranged, caught together by a ribbon, and the moonlight, silvering each golden strand, made it look powdered.

Not in Domville's wildest dreams would he have held it possible that she would come out apparently to seek him at an hour when all the world might be supposed asleep,—that he would see her thus, alone, at night. As he walked forward to meet her, his face flushed deeply in the soft, cold light, and with his joy, his rapture at seeing her thus confiding herself to him there was mingled a certain distress. . . .

Then, with a curious feeling of relief and disappointment, he suddenly became aware that there was to be a witness of this unexpected meeting; for, standing sentinel-wise, well within sight,—though not, as he quickly noted, within hearing,—was the dark short figure whose presence he had learnt to regard as inevitably linked to that of Sabine. In the uncertain light he could not even tell if the Baroness Karff was actually looking towards them, but her being there, in the background, at once to his mind absolved the young Countess from any lack of that feminine reserve which the average man regards as the special appanage of the woman who has either the good fortune to have been born his sister, or who may hope for that of becoming his wife!

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Keeping her hands still hidden, Sabine waited until she and Domville were standing close opposite to one another, and when she spoke, her voice sounded very cold.

"You must forgive me," she said, "for intruding on you at so strange an hour, but I wished to lose no time in telling you that, in coming as she did to you this morning, the Baroness Karff had no authority from me. The matter about which she thought it well to consult you, Mr. Domville, concerns myself alone; and as a matter of fact I have decided to receive myself the person of whose coming she told you."

Domville bowed without speaking. If the feelings which suddenly possessed him could have affected the woman whom he knew to be now watching them, the Baroness Karff would have had but short shrift.

"I quite understand," he said, shortly, "your annoyance that I, a stranger, was brought into the matter without your permission—and I beg you to accept my apology." He stopped abruptly. He longed to say that which should make her understand how unwillingly he had listened to the Baroness's story, and had that subtle lady been standing by their side, he would have forced her to exonerate him,—as it was, he felt unable to say anything.

But stay,—Sabine was again speaking, in a softer, kinder voice: "I do not wish you to think, Mr. Domville, that I regard you as a stranger." She came a little nearer to him, and he saw that her eyes were brimming with tears, that her pale face made, unconsciously, a desolate appeal for compassion,—nay more, for understanding, for sympathy.

As if moved by a common impulse, they both stepped from the path into the winding way which led under the trees to the circular opening now filled with the lovely scented tangle of the deserted rose-garden. There, as

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each realized with beating heart, they were indeed alone, —out of sight, as well as out of hearing, of the woman who had made this cruel mischief between them.

Domville turned and took her hand,—he held it clasped in his with a warm reassuring pressure; her distress, the humiliation with which she seemed to be struggling, touched him to a deep tenderness. He felt a great desire to shield, to protect her,—he longed to show her without the aid of any word how much he honoured her; he would have liked to kneel and kiss her feet, but some fine instinct forbade his taking that sweet liberty even with the hand that rested so confidingly in his own.

"Why should you see this man?" he asked in a low, earnest tone. "If what the Baroness Karff told me is true, he has behaved,—he is behaving,—in an unwarrantable manner. Surely it cannot be your wish to see him,"—and unconsciously his fingers tightened on hers, and his eyes scanned her jealously.

"—It is not my wish," she faltered, and then very slowly she withdrew her hand from his, and looked up into his face. "I wonder if I may ask you, Mr. Domville, to repeat to me exactly what the Baroness thought it well to tell you concerning the matter."

"She told me," he answered, "that you had been the victim of one of those arranged marriages which are so common on the Continent. She said that your acquaintance with this gentleman had been but slight, —that you had only seen him a few times, and that then by your wish the arrangement had come to an end." He went on quickly: "She also said that he has now followed you to England in the hope of making you change your mind."

While he was speaking Sabine had grown very pale. She sighed convulsively,—the word "marriage" had fallen with a terrible, a knell-like sound on her ear.

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She believed that now Domville knew everything,—everything except the, to her, less important fact of her rank. "I did not know the Baroness had told you so much," she said, "but believe me when I say I am glad that you now know the truth. Perhaps you think that I ought to have told you this before."

"No, indeed," said Domville hoarsely, "how could you have told me anything? When do I ever see you—alone? But now that I do know,"—and again he ventured to take her hand,—"then let me implore you not to see this man. I entreat you to allow the arrangement which was made to-day to stand. You are here as my guest,—that gives me the right to protect you. I think you can trust me to make him understand better than any woman could the nature of his conduct."

Domville spoke with eager conviction; he longed to have done with this painful,—this odious subject. The Baroness had evidently told him the truth; and he had wronged her by his suspicion. A load had been lifted off his heart. He was of course the right person to deal with a matter to which Sabine,—aye and even her stout-hearted guardian,—attached far too much importance.

But Sabine was still uneasy: "If you see him," she whispered, "how will you explain your intervention?"

Domville hesitated,—she was looking at him with a searching, enigmatic expression; he felt that more hung on his answer than he knew. "I shall tell him," he answered, "that you and the Baroness Karff are staying with me, and that you have commissioned me as your host to tell him that you remain firm in your desire not to see him, or hold any communication with him." He added, "The Baroness Karff did not tell me the name of the man of whom we are now speaking——"

There was a pause. And even in the shadow cast by the high trees Domville saw that she crimsoned, and he

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divined a new fear,—a new recoil to which he had no clue; but after a moment she went on speaking, making an evident effort to subdue her agitation——

"—We are told that he is travelling under the name of d'Albret. That is not his real name, but you will add to the gratitude I already bear you if you make no effort to find out who he is,—I do not think he is himself likely to tell you."

"And I should prefer," muttered Domville, "never to hear his name; indeed, never to think of him again—after to-morrow; nay, why should we put off the forgetting till to-morrow?"—and Sabine suddenly saw that Domville was tortured with jealousy.

"I had forgotten him," she said, "till I learnt of his being in England—of his intention of seeing me,—and pray believe that I have very little to remember. I never saw him as I am now seeing you—alone. On me as a woman he has no claim,—we were never lovers."

She spoke with a solemnity which brought with it, not only the assuagement of Domville's jealous pain, but a feeling of triumph, of intoxicating joy. She looked up into his face with a sad, searching look, then suddenly she felt that his eyes, his lips, mutely called her, and her whole being responded. She swayed towards him, and he took her in his arms,—he held her closely to his heart, while for a moment his lips sought, found, and clung to her sweet tremulous mouth——

Then, with a murmured word of adieu, she left him there, standing alone in the rose-garden, while she vanished under the darkness of the trees.

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CHAPTER XVII

If it is a duty to respect other men's claims, so also it is a duty to maintain one's own.

THE Baroness Karff certainly seemed possessed of a magic wand, for when Domville, carrying out her exact instructions, walked up to the great house at one o'clock the following morning, he found it completely deserted, with all the doors thrown wide open, as in a fairy tale, on the park and garden side.

And yet—no! for when he reached the end of the corridor leading to the servants' quarters he heard the shrill murmur of women's voices; and when he rang the bell in the hall, old Blake, who had resumed for that one afternoon his duties of butler, appeared, looking scarcely older than he had done twenty years before, when Francis had been last a school-boy home for the holidays.

And to-day Domville felt rather like a school-boy engaged in some scheme of which he is ashamed, but Blake, flattered at being taken into his master's confidence, restored something of Domville's self-respect by the eagerness with which he assented to his orders.

"I quite understand, sir. If the gentleman you are expecting asks to see the ladies, I am to say they are gone away, but that you are here, and will see him instead. I have taken the liberty of setting out some refreshment in the dining-room. And my wife, she's

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made a large cake—one of those cakes, sir, that you used to like when you were a young gentleman—she'd feel greatly honoured if you'd have a bit, sir."

"Certainly," said Domville good-naturedly; "I'll eat a piece of Mrs. Blake's cake after my visitor has gone."

The hour that followed was long in wearing itself away; Domville found it impossible to occupy his mind with anything but the coming interview. Once more he was possessed—torn with jealousy. What possible reason could there be why Sabine should shrink from telling him the name of the man he was now awaiting so impatiently? The Baroness had admitted that it was in order to avoid him that they had come over to England. But this was hardly consistent with her reiterated assurance that the man, whoever he was, had no shadow of a claim.

Domville recalled with uneasy pain Sabine's extreme fear—it almost seemed to him, looking back, her physical fear—of the unwelcome visitor who was coming to force himself into her presence. The memory of how she had looked, when she had been speaking of him, was not a pleasant recollection for the man who now knew that he loved this still mysteriously little known woman with an all-absorbing passion.

A thousand fancies, a thousand suspicions, each more impossible and grotesque than the other, floated through Domville's brain. He remembered more than one case where an English girl, safe-guarded by all the barriers erected by birth and wealth, had been courted, even sometimes married, by an adventurer. One such story he had realized very vividly, for the heroine had been a member of his own faith, the daughter of a Catholic house; she had been apparently bewitched by a valet masquerading as a foreign noble, and the marriage had only been averted at the last moment. Was it possible that such an ignoble and grotesque adventure

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could have befallen Sabine Reiffersberg,—she whom he knew to be so passionately proud, whom he felt to be so delicately pure? One of the words the Baroness, in her agitation, had let fall, lent possibility to the outrageous and odious thought. And yet now Domville felt a keen repulsion for the rôle he had consented to play, but at the same time there was a certain fierce joy in the knowledge that here, after all, he would have the other man, whoever and whatever he might be, at an advantage.

At last, about two o'clock, when the long hour of waiting in the silence which filled the great old house had become almost unbearable, Domville heard the sound of wheels. He walked quickly across the hall to one of the tall latticed windows which gave on the courtyard, and looked out,—then he became aware that the visitor whose approach had filled, not only the Countess Sabine but also her doughty guardian, the Baroness Karff, with such an extremity of fear, had not chosen to make his appearance in very dignified or mysterious guise. He had simply hired one of the ancient open flys to be found in the station yard of all the smaller towns within an hour or two from London; greatly to Domville's surprise, there were two men sitting in the shabby landau which now drew up in the courtyard.

The concealed watcher did not wait to see the strangers get out and ring the bell. Instead, he began again walking up and down, feeling his courage rise, his jealous pain and curiosity steadied into watchful attention, as the interview drew near.

Some minutes went by,—a certain amount of parleying was evidently going on. Doubtless the two visitors were trying to find out if the lady they had come to see had really left Gaynesford.

There came a welcome sound of shuffling footsteps;

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and Blake—Blake, holding a small card in his hand, and with a puzzled look on his old face—entered the hall, and came close up to his master. "The two gentlemen —they are quite gentlemen, if I may say so, sir—declare that they don't like to disturb you, but that they would be much obliged if you would see them, as they would like to ask you the whereabouts of the ladies. The one who speaks English seems very disappointed not to be able to see them—in fact, he was quite positive they were here."

Domville took the card and looked at it rather eagerly. There was inscribed on it "Comte d'Albret," and then, written in pencil, the name of a small London hotel. "And the other gentleman?" asked Domville with sudden suspicion: "Did he give neither card nor name?"

"No, sir, he didn't speak to me at all. I don't think he knows how to talk English. But he did say something—I think he was persuading his friend to see you, sir. Is the carriage to be put up?"

"No," said Domville sharply, "certainly not. It can wait where it is. Now show them in."

Domville could not have described, even to himself, what sort of man he expected to see, but in any case someone very different from the small, rather too stout, and yet not ungraceful-looking young fellow now advancing towards him.

Comte d'Albret, if this was indeed his name, had about his manner that perfect self-possession and happy ease which only belongs to the adventurer of genius, or to that individual who has always found himself from birth upwards fortune's favourite. He was followed, at some little distance, by an older and less good-tempered looking man.

Though he was as unobservant of other men's clothes as the average Englishman is wont to be, Domville

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suddenly became aware that the Comte d'Albret was remarkably well dressed; it was clear that he was his tailor's favourite as well as that of fortune; the very best had been made of the short figure, already inclining to a stoutness unusual in one still young; his waistcoat was a thought more dandified than that which even the most foppish Englishman of his own generation would have worn. But still the general effect was extremely good; and Domville realized, with mingled relief and regret, that the man advancing towards him was a well-bred foreigner. Still, he was a dandy—and Domville hated dandies. Why, even his tie had been chosen with a nice regard to his curiously dark complexion! His hair was cut in the modern French fashion, very close to his head; and, as he was silhouetted for a moment against the open door, Domville was struck by the extreme brightness of his small, black eyes.

It seemed so impossible to think of this man, and such a woman as Domville knew Sabine Reiffersberg to be, in any sort of relationship the one to the other, that his jealous suspicions were suddenly allayed. This, surely, was a case of the moth and the star; but, as Domville very well knew, the human moth can in certain cases make itself exceedingly disagreeable,—in fact outrageously so,—to the feminine star on whom he has fixed presumptuous eyes.

As the Comte d'Albret proceeded down the great hall of Gaynesford Manor with leisurely, rather mincing, steps, he looked round him with evident admiration. Then, as if he had only just caught sight of his host,—Domville was standing rather in the shadow with his back to the great fireplace,—he wheeled about, and bowed with easy grace.

"I must beg you," he said, "to pardon my intrusion,"—the voice was cultivated and the English

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fluent. "But your servant seemed to think that it would be well for me to see you, and clear up what is certainly a strange imbroglio. I understood that a lady who calls herself the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg had taken this house, and was staying here, but now I learn that this is a mistake."

He looked inquiringly at Domville, and, though he spoke with a marked foreign accent, it was clear that he knew English exceedingly well.

Domville hesitated; he had no wish to follow the Baroness Karff's tortuous instructions to the letter, and besides, if there were indeed a spy in her German household, where was the good of lying? And yet, in deference to Sabine's wishes, he could not tell the truth. "The lady of whom you speak," he answered, "has been staying here, not as my tenant, but as my guest; she was accompanied by the Baroness Karff, who is an old friend of my family."

"In that case," exclaimed the other, "I should be glad if you would tell me where these two ladies now are, for I have come to England on purpose to see them on important business."

"I cannot do that," said Domville slowly, "for they are extremely desirous of concealing their whereabouts from everyone; the younger lady has been seriously ill, and has come to this country, or so I understand, to regain her health. But if there is anything you would like me to communicate to her in writing I will see that it reaches her, and that"—Domville hesitated, and then came out roundly—"without being in any way tampered with."

He felt surprised at his own words, but there was something curiously attractive and disarming in this stout young stranger of whom the two women he was there to protect seemed so afraid,—and besides, he could afford to be generous.

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"I see," cried the Comte d'Albret with a sudden laugh, "that you know my friend the Baroness Karff, and that you are up to her little tricks!"—and as Domville, disconcerted, made no answer, he continued rather eagerly, "I may tell you that I have come here in person because I knew it would be no use to write! In fact, I have written again and again, and my letters have always been returned to me unopened, and re-addressed by the Baroness, whose handwriting I have only too much cause to know!"

In answer to a scarcely perceptible sign, the Comte d'Albret's companion had retreated, and now stood quite out of earshot, examining curiously one of the portraits which hung on the further wall beneath the panoply of arms and armour.

"I do not know," the Comte d'Albret went on, coming close up to Domville, and lowering his voice, "how far you are in the complete confidence of these ladies whom you have entertained as your guests?"—and he looked attentively at the tall, and as he thought very honest, if uncourteous, Englishman, who had not even invited him to be seated.

"I know absolutely nothing of their private affairs," said Domville coldly; "but I think it only fair to tell you that they were apparently aware that you intended to come here, and that they seemed exceedingly anxious to avoid you."

"You are very frank, sir," said the other, and his olive-tinted cheeks flushed darkly.

"In your place," said Domville curtly, "I should certainly prefer to know the truth."

As he heard these words, a sudden light seemed to break in on Comte d'Albret. He swung the light cane in his hand—a cane with a jewelled top which perhaps played its part in making its owner appear to Domville as a lover of small account—twice in the air. "Ah,

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yes," he said meditatively, "it is always well to know the truth; but then, from what you tell me, you yourself are ignorant of the truth! Am I to understand, Mr. Domville, that you are sincere in telling me that you do not know who I am,—or why I come here?"

"Not only do I not know," answered Domville, looking his persistent visitor straight in the eyes, "but I have given my word not to try and find out. I understand from the two ladies of whom we have been speaking that this is likely to be your wish quite as much as theirs."

"Yes, perhaps it is best so," said the other thoughtfully; "especially if it is true that you have not known for very long this lady,"—he waited a moment, then took a rather dirty envelope out of his pocket, and, peering down at it, read out the name,—"'the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg.' So that's what she calls herself, eh?"

"I know the Countess very well," said Domville, with a touch of sharp exasperation in his voice. How affected, how false this foppish young fellow showed himself to be! He had spoken of Sabine by her name in almost the first sentence he had uttered, so why should he pretend to forget it now? "In no circumstances would I care to discuss her with one who is to me—pardon me for saying so—an entire stranger."

"Ah! but the Countess,"—again the Comte d'Albret peered at the envelope he still held in his small white hand with malicious affectation,—"the Countess Reiffersberg and myself are by no means entire strangers." Then, perhaps seeing something ominous of a disturbance to his own personal comfort in the other's face, he added hastily, and with a good-humoured laugh, "But as she has gone—as she refuses to receive me—there remains nothing for me to do but to apologize for my intrusion, and to go away. I shall always," he

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concluded graciously, "be very glad that I have had the opportunity of seeing Gaynesford. When I was a boy at Beaumont I was well acquainted with a Father Domville, who is, I presume, a relation of yours."

"My second cousin," said Domville briefly, "my father's first cousin,"—he was not aware that his manner was cold to the verge of rudeness.

The Comte d'Albret made a curious sound with his lips—something between a call and a whistle. In obedience to the signal, the older man, who had kept his back scrupulously turned to the other two during their short conversation, came towards them.

"By the way," said Comte d'Albret suddenly, "I omitted the duty of presenting to you my friend, the Marquis Polidore Porthos, a title bestowed by the Holy Father,"—in uttering the aside he made a slight grimace, and Domville could scarcely help smiling. "Porthos is his real name! He has had serious thoughts of changing it, for it is so difficult, as you say here, to 'live up to' such a name as that! But he succeeds—for he adores adventure! He is the last of the romantics!" and he cast a look of patronizing affection at his companion. The older man smiled blandly; this question of his name was evidently an old joke between himself and his friend.

"Once more I thank you," said Comte d'Albret, drawing his heels together and bowing low, and being exactly imitated in the gesture by the Marquis. "I shall never forget, dear Mr. Domville, your gracious hospitality,"—there was something of mockery, something also a thought reproachful, in his tone.

Domville felt, and showed, a certain embarrassment. "I fear your interview with me has not been very satisfactory," he said awkwardly,—and then, "You have a long drive before you, so I hope you will allow me to offer you something before you start"—and rather

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hurriedly he preceded the other two into the dining-room which led out of the smaller hall, outside which the fly was waiting.

The Comte d'Albret looked round with eager curiosity at the tapestried walls, the Jacobean sideboard, and the four impressive figures, clad in coats of mail, which seemed to be mounting guard before the cavernous fireplace.

Then his small, singularly brilliant, eyes became fixed on the table, on the decanters and the glasses, on the soda water and ice, also on the large home-made cake: "Excellent!" he cried gleefully. "We had but a very light déjeuner à la fourchette at the buffet of the Waterloo station. Wonderful, is it not, that the English should have won such a battle considering what they always eat? You must admit that in England the food is execrable."

The Marquis Polidore Porthos seemed suddenly to understand what the one-sided conversation was about, for he nodded his head vigorously, while looking at the Comte d'Albret much as looks a hungry dog at his master, longing yet not daring to seize on a dainty dangling before his eager eyes. The other suddenly noticed this: "Et toi, mon bon?" he said good-naturedly, and "mon bon" at once cut himself a huge piece of Mrs. Blake's cake.

"There is only one thing in England that is perfect," continued Domville's extraordinary visitor, "and that is the Englishwoman. Taking these ladies à la masse, as we say at Monaco, they are wonderfully good-looking!" He translated into quick idiomatic French what he had just said for the benefit of his friend, and the other again nodded his head with great vigour. "So much excellent raw material," said the Comte d'Albret, pensively, "but it is years since I came to England—years and years."

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Domville longed to kick the insolent fellow. During the last ten minutes his liking, his toleration, for his visitor had changed into active dislike. But this foreigner was here as his guest enjoying, very evidently enjoying, his hospitality; and so, "You speak English remarkably well," said Domville at last, "in fact I have never heard a Frenchman speak it so well."

"But I am not a Frenchman!" exclaimed the Comte d'Albret. "My friend here is a Parisian; but I am Spanish, Italian, German, Portuguese,—French, too, no doubt in a sense, mais si peu!" He was munching cake with school-boy zest, and sipping the weak whisky and water he had mixed for himself. "I shall always be glad," he said, looking round the splendid and rather sombre apartment in which he found himself—"glad indeed that I have had the opportunity of seeing Gaynesford Manor. It is a very fine house, quite a place for a King—or even a Queen, in exile," —and he gave Domville a quick glance, as if he hoped to catch him unaware.

"The Comte d'Artois did stay here for a time," said Domville, surprised at the words, and vaguely angered by the inquisitive look. "My great-grandfather lent him the house one summer; but I think he found it too lonely,—at any rate he did not remain here long, but many years later, when he had become King of France, he sent us these tapestries."

"Does the Baroness Karff know of this interesting historical fact?" asked the Comte d'Albret.

"I don't know," replied Domville, "I don't suppose anyone ever told her. I certainly did not."

"Well, I advise you to tell her," said the other, "it will please her very much. She is a great snob. She can only breathe in the atmosphere of courts."

"There is no such atmosphere here," said Domville, rather tartly.

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"Ah, yes, there still remains the aroma of the Comte d'Artois," the Comte d'Albret gave a shrill little laugh; then, with a sudden graceful cat-like gesture, he plucked the astonished Englishman by the sleeve, and drew him rather to one side; though it was evident that his friend did not know a word of English, he lowered his voice:—

"In return for your hospitality," he murmured, "and also because I am at last convinced that we have been really playing at cross-purposes, I will give you a precious word of advice. Beware of the Baroness Karff; do not let her make you a catspaw—it is a rôle she delights in allotting to those who have the misfortune to be brought in contact with her."

He spoke with evident sincerity, and even emotion, and Domville was too much amazed, too much taken aback, to make any reply.

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PART III

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CHAPTER XVIII

Un esclave est moins celui qu'on vend, que celui qui se donne.

THE night of Joaquina's supper-party had come, and the garden at the base of the old brick tower in Islington was lighted up with tiny Chinese lanterns which made the miniature wilderness, ever filled with a constant succession of sweet-smelling flowers and shrubs, appear in the half-lit darkness illimitable.

Paul Feyghine, pacing up and down a path bounding the further end of the garden, impatiently waiting for his cousin's arrival to set him free, was yet aware of the fantastic and exquisite effects created by the warring lights. His thoughts dwelt with tenderness on the child—on Nicolette; he wished she could be there to see her garden looking, as it looked to-night, like a glade of fairy-land, but Nicolette was far away, an inmate of that latest modern device for saving the wealthy trouble, a children's seaside hotel.

On the garden side, the tower was outlined in light, each electric spark enclosed in a blue globe, intensifying the darkness of the great mass reared up against the light summer sky. But the windows of the large octagon room where the dancer's supper party was about to take place were open on to steps leading down to the garden, and a broad stream of light fell on the patch of grass now covered by the little stage on which Joaquina, two hours hence, would dance for the entertainment of the Grand Duke and her other guests.

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Her other guests! A look, half bitter, half humorous, came over Feyghine's stern set lips as he remembered the discussion which had taken place concerning this important question.

The Grand Duke, delicately consulted as to which of the stars of the British music-hall stage he desired to meet, had used a strange expression—one which had much amused Joaquina when its exact meaning had been made clear. "Surtout pas de pêches à quinze sous!"—so had run the Imperial edict.

But then had come the momentous question as to who, in Joaquina's circle, was capable of making the selection, or rather of throwing out the speckled peaches from that human basket where the dancer could alone hope to have her pick. Was any fruit likely to be quite whole, quite free from flaw, in such a basket?

Then had arisen another and a far more substantial difficulty. The time of year had come when the stars of the music-hall stage and of musical comedy leave London to steer erratic courses through the provinces; to be sure a certain number of these ladies were "resting," but, according to Joaquina, a star compelled to "rest" at this time of year is undoubtedly "une pêche à quinze sous."

At last, however, the problem had been solved as such problems are apt to be solved. The most faithful, untiring and unobtrusive member of Joaquina's train of admirers was one of those individuals,—especially common in the theatrical and music-hall worlds,—who delight in occupying the often onerous post of an unpaid and unofficial Master of the Ceremonies; he had been early nicknamed by some now vanished member of Joaquina's inner circle "the Satellite," and now by that name alone was he known. Everyone else about her was understood to have some other form of existence, led elsewhere, in regions where Joaquina's name was

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but a name. But the Satellite seemed to have no such alternate life; he lived in lodgings in Bloomsbury, and his only interest, apart from the famous dancer and her doings, centred in white mice. He and little Nicolette possessed rival mouseries, whose inmates were tenderly cared for and cherished.

It was the Satellite who at last suggested the obvious solution to the question which was disturbing not only Joaquina, but also Feyghine. This was that the Russian attaché who was to be in attendance on the Grand Duke—for his Highness had decided to-night to dispense with the presence of his aide-de-camp—should be shown a list of possible lady guests. And then, after a certain amount of parleying had taken place, it had become clear that the Grand Duke much preferred quality to quantity, and that brains rather than beauty were for the moment occupying the critical attention of his august mind,—perhaps that was what he had really meant to imply when he had made that curious stipulation, for a "pêche à quinze sous" woman is always beautiful, and generally far from clever.

The choice of the men who were to have the honour of meeting Joaquina's Imperial guest had been far more easily determined,—the more so that two out of the five who were to grace the banquet were already selected. These two were Francis Domville, with whom Joaquina could well have dispensed, and the Satellite, whose presence, on such occasions as these, was his natural and very reasonable perquisite.

Feyghine took out his watch and held it up close under one of the tiny Chinese lanterns; he saw that it marked eleven o'clock, and that meant that Domville would not appear for at least another half hour. He turned, and walking down the garden sprang up the

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steps leading to the supper room; it was deserted, save for one compelling presence,—the long gleaming panel portrait of Joaquina, painted *en pied* by a supreme artist, who had thrown all his science, as well as all his inspiration, on to the canvas. To-night, as this superb, strongly living presentment of the woman he loved met his eye for the thousandth time, the painted figure struck Feyghine as being more highly vitalized,—in a sense more vividly alive, than was now the dancer herself. With a pang he remembered the old superstition, ever springing up afresh among the primitive and the untaught, that a portrait withdraws and absorbs something of the life and vitality of the sitter.

Then he shrugged his great shoulders, ashamed of his folly, and turned his back to Joaquina's picture, telling himself that Nicolette's illness had shaken his nerve. He looked attentively at the oval table spread out before him; after all, he was the real, though invisible, host,—he could not doubt that his Imperial godfather was well aware of that,—and he had even arranged that Gregor should be in attendance to wait on the Grand Duke.

Paul's brow cleared. The table was admirably arranged; flowers, fruit, wine, — each perfect of its kind; no speckled peaches here, no faded blossoms. He glanced involuntarily at the special ice-pail in which was resting the musk-scented champagne which the Grand Duke's aide-de-camp had taken the liberty of sending that morning in order that the Imperial digestion should be as tranquilly happy as the mental side of the Grand Duke hoped to be during the only "spree"—his Highness was well acquainted with the English word and all it signifies—that he had allowed himself during an otherwise very dull visit to London.

Then suddenly Feyghine, with brow once more overcast, began to count the chairs placed round the table,

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and with mingled surprise and annoyance he became aware that the table was laid for fourteen, and not for ten. What an absurd mistake! And yet—yet it was after all just possible that four more guests, unknown to him, had been added at the last moment, perhaps in deference to some wish expressed by the Grand Duke himself.

Feyghine began slowly walking round the large oval table, taking up, as he did so, each of the cards on which were clearly written in the Satellite's own admirable handwriting — satellites always write very clearly—the names of Joaquina's guests. He began his survey to the right of the arm-chair on which the Grand Duke was to sit, and he raised the card whereon the Satellite had inscribed, in letters so large that the one word filled up the whole wide space, "Joaquina." How well the Satellite knew how to minister to the dancer's insatiable vanity! How well he knew what was likely to please her! Feyghine smiled and sighed. He had an indulgent toleration of, even liking for, the Satellite; of him, at least, he had never been jealous. So it was that he only glanced carelessly at the next place, marked by a card on which was inscribed, this time in very small letters, "Mr. Benedict Stone," for such was the Satellite's own modest name; Feyghine had almost forgotten it, so accustomed was he to think of the bearer of it by the title he had made his own.

There had been some little discussion as to where the Satellite should be seated at the Imperial banquet, for Joaquina had made it unkindly plain that she would prefer a fresher and a more interesting neighbour than the Satellite at this time of day could pretend to be. But he had made good his claim. Who else could watch, as he could be trusted to watch, over the material comfort of the Grand Duke? Who else would be

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content to leave his hostess full freedom to entertain her illustrious guest?

Next to himself the Satellite had judiciously placed Maudie O'Farrell, the solemn-faced girl who, straight from a convent school, had sprung into sudden fame by her amazing, unforced gift of mimicry. There was still about her personality, as about her art, a peculiar elusive flavour of wild fruit. Soon alas! Maudie was to run serious risk of losing this flavour, for that autumn she was to make her début in the title rôle of a new musical comedy entitled "William-Tell-It-All," and the name of the author of that forthcoming Swiss idyll, a certain Mr. John Pinke, was written on the card marking the place next to Miss O'Farrell.

Mr. Pinke's neighbour was to be Doris Seymour. Now there were worse people in the world than the little burlesque actress, for whom Joaquina had of late professed an exaggerated affection. On the other hand, it was difficult to see why she had been asked to come to-night, or why she had been placed between Johnny Pinke and the Russian attaché who was to be in attendance on the Grand Duke. If, however, Doris Seymour was not likely to prove specially attractive to such an intelligent cosmopolitan as was M. Stassulvitch, he would certainly enjoy the conversation of his other neighbour, Mireille Lyons, the Parisian singer who was as great an artist as Joaquina herself, and even more famous.

Just now Mireille was on a flying visit to London, and her presence at to-night's supper party was a favour, for she was known not to care for this kind of festivity. She was actually staying in the Tower, spending a couple of days with Joaquina, having left the smart lady, whose guest she had been, at the dancer's eagerly expressed wish. Years ago, when Joaquina Nuñez was in Paris for the first time, Mireille Lyons, then in the

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first burst of her extraordinary vogue, had been very kind to the débutante, and there had remained a certain link between the two women, in spite of their very different natures.

Mireille Lyons had no pretensions to beauty, but her large, melancholy, light green eyes, her delicately modelled nose, her thin mouth—a strip of mobile scarlet, made up a whole more memorable, more unforgettable, than mere physical perfection. She was a woman of varied attainments and gifts; she wrote and thought as well as sang, and she was said to choose the subjects of her *macabré* songs, aye, even on occasion to suggest the most telling and original couplets.

The French singer, it seemed, already knew the Grand Duke, and when she had first heard of the honour in store for her, she had described him in a few terse words,—"Vieux bonhomme gâteux—et gâté." No, no, that was not fair! Feyghine knew his godfather was more than that; and yet this was how the old man appeared to these shrewd Bohemian folk with whom he deigned to associate during his annual visits to Paris.

Poor Mireille Lyons! In spite of her bitter tongue, Paul Feyghine had always liked her, liked her infinitely more than he did any of Joaquina's other feminine associates. Only a few days ago, the French singer, in company with himself and Nicolette, had spent a happy hour in the garden of the Tower; and Mireille had sung to the child tender, lightsome ditties of old France —French nursery classics. She had also then revealed to Feyghine her secret ideal, the dream which she meant should come true,—that of a snug, bourgeois existence in some be-ribboned, be-lilaced villa, close to Paris, on the slopes maybe of Courbevoie, with the great city where she had been born, and which had been at first so cruel and then so kind, spread out

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before the windows, thus affording those glimpses of the infinite without which no artist can live. For the rest of Mireille's dream was simply the very human terre-à-terre ideal which bounds the horizon of every young Frenchwoman,—that is, a vision of herself as the centre of a group composed of Monsieur, Madame, et Bébé. "I shall have to buy the man," Mireille had said grimly, "but the child will be my own." She had added, for there was a bitter, cruel edge to this strange woman's nature, "The one advantage we women, as mothers, have over you men, as fathers, is the entire absence of doubt as to the identity of our children,"—and as Feyghine, for a moment, had not understood, she had made, by means of a scarcely perceptible glance at Nicolette, her meaning very clear.

And now Paul, standing behind what was so soon to be Mireille Lyons' chair, suddenly remembered her words, and her glance at the child. A look of anger and sharp pain came over his face as he tried to thrust the recollection from him. He quickly moved on, and bent his head over the next place. Yes, as had been originally arranged, next to Mireille came Francis Domville. Feyghine let his mind dwell with a certain pleasure, a certain relief, on his English cousin; there had been moments of late when the two had seemed far apart, and this had been particularly true during the last three months, but it was still to his kinsman and housemate that Paul always instinctively turned for help,—to Domville, and to Domville's sister, Anne Leycester.

He came back to his scrutiny, telling himself that none of the names, with the one exception of that of Johnny Pinke, the insignificant author of "William-Tell-It-All," had come as a surprise. Who, then, were Joaquina's mysterious other guests? Well, he would soon know; Feyghine picked up the card lying in front

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of the plate to Domville's right,—it was blank! Then he looked at the next place; ah! here he was again in familiar waters, for on the card was written "Mr. James Rivers."

James Rivers? The delightful, well-bred man of the world who had been content to fritter away his life in such agreeable fooling, in such clever trifling, that the outcome, the reward of it all, was the fact that, on such occasions as the present, his name was sure to be the first which spontaneously occurred, not only to Joaquina and to the Satellite, but also to Feyghine, aye, even to Domville, as the one indispensable, the one good guest. They all felt,—they all knew, that Rivers would make the thing "go" if anybody could. Even in his worst form he would be more amusing than any other man present, and then his taste could be relied on to make everything work smoothly,—to turn contretemps into triumphs.

Feyghine wondered uneasily who the unknown woman was who had been chosen to sit at the nominal host's right hand, with Rivers on her other side. And next to Rivers? Ah! here again, Feyghine found a name he expected to find,—that of Phœbe Holl, the American transformation artist, who was at the present moment Maudie O'Farrell's only serious rival; for the short, stout, powerful-looking young woman possessed the singular power of making herself appear wholly other than she was. The Grand Duke had specially desired to meet her, and she had originally completed the list of Joaquina's feminine guests.

Feyghine did not take up the card marking the next place; he simply bent his big head and broad shoulders down over the table,—a glance was enough; the name written there brought up before him the one permanent element in Joaquina's circle for which he felt a passion of dislike, nay hatred. As he stared at the card, he

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saw rising before him the spreading figure—one of those figures which often possess as much individuality as have the faces of their owners—of Tom Hacking, the great soap millionaire, a poor wretch who longed for love as the thirsty long for water, but who could never hope to be loved for himself. Paul Feyghine, always so pitiful to any form of human suffering, had never felt any mercy for the man whose flabby, pallid, and yet powerful face, framed in dull red hair, had become so odiously familiar.

Seeing that name before him, that name which brought with it a vision of its owner, Feyghine's forehead grew seamed with anger. And yet he might have known, he might surely have guessed, that Hacking on such an occasion would certainly be present. He was so disturbed that he scarcely troubled to glance at the last card of all, which marked the place of the woman who was to sit to the left of the Grand Duke; nay, before he looked at it, he knew by a sort of instinct that it would be blank—blank as was that other card marking the place to Domville's right.

Then light broke in upon Feyghine, as he realized—the thought bringing with it a certain comfort—that Johnny Pinke and Tom Hacking must have been added, probably at the last moment, to balance two mysterious feminine additions to Joaquina's supper-party, for these blank cards should, of course, contain names the Satellite had either deliberately omitted, or of which he had been ignorant. Feyghine wondered with a good deal of uneasiness who these two women added, at the last moment, to the carefully chosen party could be.

Then the door behind him, for he had by now completed the circuit of the table, opened, and through it there drifted, as might have done a feather blown by a sweet scented wind, a fantastic little figure which glided

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to where Feyghine was standing, and leant wearily against his strong right arm, while a voice asked rather plaintively, "How do you find me?"—for Joaquina, though English had become her usual language, generally thought in French or Spanish, and she often translated into the speech of what had been her father's country any familiar foreign idiom that best expressed her meaning.

Paul turned round quickly, and the look of sudden absorption which the sound of one voice alone still had power to raise, came into his face, and filled his blue eyes with strange gleams, while his mouth lost its look of stern repression. He sought for the term of extravagant praise which alone would please her; and, as he sought, he told himself with a certain exultation that nothing he found would be in truth extravagant, for Joaquina had about her to-night a curious, almost an unearthly, touch of ethereal beauty. Her closely fashioned clinging gown was of some dark green and blue texture, translucent as sea waves, and the man now looking down at her with tender, adoring eyes, thought that such might have been the dancing dress of a sea nymph sent for to entertain the Court of Venus.

Then his face darkened, for he suddenly saw in her short, naturally curling hair, a strange, and as he guessed only too surely, a very costly ornament shaped like a leaf, and set with large emeralds powdered with diamonds; it served to keep in place a pale green ostrich feather. This, doubtless, had been the price of Hacking's presence at the Grand Ducal supper-party.

Joaquina suspected that something had annoyed her companion; she moved more closely to him, and her eyes shone brightly between their long, almond-shaped lids, while her small, and now pouting mouth, intensified the clear, rose-tinted pallor of her face.

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Then to Paul Feyghine, gazing down into the face lifted up to his, there came the quick perception, fought against, thrust into the background of his mind only to start forward again, grinning malevolently, that the dancer, in spite, or perhaps because, of her delicate, haunting charm, looked strangely fragile. With a pang of remorse he told himself that he had been too deeply absorbed in Nicolette of late to take much heed of Joaquina; and yet he had persuaded her to see the famous doctor who had been sent for to the child.

The great man, after a very few questions, had become suddenly serious; he had refused to say much to Feyghine—"I suppose she lives in an alternate atmosphere of heat and cold,—of depression and excitement? Yes? Well, that must stop, and she must leave off her dancing for a while."

Feyghine had cast at the powerful, inscrutable face of the older man a deprecating glance, which had been answered by one of involuntary pity and concern. Both knew that the excellent advice had little chance of being carried out,—was it likely that Joaquina could be persuaded to leave off dancing, even for a little while?

Remembering this, Feyghine looked at the light figure resting against him, and a chill came over his heart,—for a moment the folds of green and blue chiffon seemed like sea waves lapping the white limbs of a drowned woman. He turned and clasped her to him more closely, "Your costume is perfect,—absolutely perfect," he stammered.

The spot of pink deepened in Joaquina's pale cheeks,—she loved, nay, lived on, praise. "It is almost exactly like the one that is being designed for me to wear in the new Mermaid ballet. They wanted the skirt to be trimmed with silver seaweed, but I——"

Feyghine suddenly interrupted her,—"Have you taken your cod-liver oil to-day?"

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—Joaquina detached herself swiftly from his arms with a petulant, angry little gesture. "Why recall to me to-night that I am thin? It's unkind and stupid—excessively stupid! Cod-liver oil never made anyone fat! Your doctor's no good, he's only a child's doctor! Doris Seymour told me of a man who cures one of everything. If I don't feel better soon, I shall go to him. I was a fool to see your Sir Thomas! It's not rest and quiet I want,—it's amusement—it's excitement. But how tired I am of everything,—how bored!"

She began running round the table with swift, silent, sandalled feet. Then, suddenly, she stopped by the place laid next to where Francis Domville was to sit, and took up the blank card with an impatient exclamation. The current of her thought changed as swiftly as a child's, "Why they've forgotten to put Mrs. Winfrith's name on her card! But the Satellite's sure to be early; he's the only person who does anything properly for me—he's the only friend I've got who does what I want!" Then she looked at Feyghine exactly as does a cruel spiteful child who, having said something likely to wound, waits to see how the grown-up arbiter of its fate will accept the rebuke.

"Mrs. Winfrith?"—there were incredulity and annoyance struggling in Feyghine's voice. "Did the Grand Duke ask that she should be invited?"

Penelope Winfrith was perhaps the most original and interesting feminine personality in that portion of the London world in which the two cousins, Feyghine and Domville, lived and had their being. The only child of a certain Lord Wantley, a peer now long dead, who had been famed all over the world for his great philanthropies, she had early shaken herself free from her first austere associations. Still young, as youth is counted nowadays, Mrs. Winfrith had been twice married; the first time to a millionaire who had left her all his wealth

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the second to a man who had begun to take his place of late among that small group of really distinguished statesmen in whom their friends see future Prime Ministers.

As a girl, as a widow, even—it was whispered—as a married woman, Penelope had been fond of trying experiments in emotion; and yet, for in these matters the world is a shrewd judge, she was not suspected or censured as were so many women among her contemporaries who showed a far more careful regard for appearances than it had ever occurred to her to do. But, in spite of her freedom of action, Mrs. Winfrith found life at times even more boring than did Joaquina; and in pursuit, not so much of pleasure, as of delicate and complicated sensations, she was ever ready to embark in unconventional adventure, and to make excursions into regions very different from that well-established, hereditarily political world which she now adorned.

It should, perhaps, be added that Mrs. Winfrith still deserved the reputation for extreme personal beauty which she had now enjoyed for nearly twenty years, and, further, that her childless state had caused her of late to take a rather wistful interest in young girls. Her newest social phase was that of kindly and sympathetic chaperon; and it was in this connection that Domville had that spring been constantly thrown with her, for she had taken what had been for her a strong fancy to Rose Hassal,—the two had been constantly together, and Mrs. Winfrith had certainly done all in her power to forward Domville's interests.

But to return to Feyghine and Joaquina. The dancer made for a while no answer to the question asked of her. She stood, still poised, a graceful, and, to Feyghine's eyes, an entrancing figure, beating one foot lightly in the air; she was absorbed in think-

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ing, not of the man standing near her, but wholly of herself. Was it possible that in this matter Paul knew better than she did herself whom the Grand Duke would like to meet?

Joaquina had a shrewd, calculating side to her nature. No woman can attain—and keep—the highest rank in any of those arts which minister to the senses if she be wholly lacking in this quality. She had gradually become aware that there is in England a very high little world which welcomes and pays homage to those who like herself make strong appeal to the sensuous, beauty-loving side of human nature. Now into that world, members of which, women as well as men, took delight in her dancing, Joaquina had not as yet made her way; she had with it, at best, only a nodding acquaintance.

The dancer had, therefore, seized with avidity the opportunity to show what she believed to be a favour to Mrs. Winfrith. The invitation had been made at Mireille's suggestion; and the singer, whom Joaquina knew, from long experience, to be so acute and clever a woman as well as her own loyal friend, had said: "Ton grand-duc sera bien content de rencontrer Madame Winfrith." Unfortunately there had been no time to make sure of the Imperial guest's satisfaction, and now Feyghine's evident dismay disturbed the dancer—was she making what Mireille would call "une gaffe"?

"And the other lady?—she whom you have placed to the left of my godfather—who is she?" Feyghine spoke very gently; he was determined not to spoil Joaquina's pleasure in her supper-party. But he was filled with a perhaps unreasonable dismay; for, as is the case with all those who have lived in the atmosphere of a court, certain points of royal etiquette were to Paul, not only inviolable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, but also mere commonplaces of good breeding.

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That a host, honoured by the presence of a royal personage, should add to such a gathering as this was to be four strangers whose names had not been submitted in the first instance as possible guests, shocked his sense of decorum; and that such a thing should happen in what was, after all, his house, greatly mortified him.

Meanwhile the dancer gave him a quick, rather troubled glance. "The other lady?" she repeated vaguely, "I forget her name, but she's a great friend of Mrs. Winfrith; she's staying with her now, and Mireille said I must ask her also. But she already knows the Grand Duke,"—then, oppressed by Paul Feyghine's grave look, Joaquina turned away pouting, and muttered, "C'est fait maintenant; n'y pensons plus!"

"Do you mean Mrs. Winfrith or her friend? Which of them is already acquainted with my godfather?" asked Feyghine patiently.

"The friend, Paul, the friend! Naturellement! She specially asked if she could sit next to him."

Feyghine shrugged his shoulders. It was too late to do anything now; and after all Mireille Lyons was no fool, while the Grand Duke, particularly on such occasions as this, had the reputation of being good-natured.

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CHAPTER XIX

"La galanterie fait parti des droits, presque des devoirs du monde auquel nous appartenons, et si on l'en retirait tout à coup, ce monde ne serait plus tenable."

IT was close on midnight, and Francis Domville stood in the small, panelled hall which formed the base of the square tower. In his hand was crushed a note which had been handed to him by his cousin as the two had exchanged a hurried greeting. The note contained a pencilled list of those who were coming to supper, and Domville had contented himself with glancing at it for a moment with unseeing eyes.

Most of those who were to be present had already arrived, and a subdued murmur of voices drifted in from the garden. Domville was now impatiently awaiting Joaquina's chief guest, but the Grand Duke, and the diplomatist who was to take the place of his aide-de-camp, were already nearly half an hour late.

As he walked up and down with caged steps across the uneven stone floor, Francis Domville was in that state of mind which makes a man, wherever he may be, and in whatever company he may find himself, see but one face, hear but one voice, feel about him but one invisible, insistent presence. To please Feyghine, in response to an urgent appeal, Domville had made a sacrifice which was costing him more than even he had expected it to do. The number of people about to be present at the supper party, their names, their person-

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alities, were to him matters of no moment: he would of course do his best to take Feyghine's place, and to make himself agreeable to those about him, but, though his body would be here obedient to his guidance, nothing could prevent his spirit, his heart,—in a word, everything he called himself,—being at Gaynesford.

For Joaquina Nuñez, Francis Domville had always felt the clear-sighted dislike only possible to a man, where a young and attractive woman is concerned, when he is considering her in relation to another man. To his mind she was a vain, grasping, untruthful, and unmoral human being, unfortunately dowered with one enchanting gift, that of supreme grace. He had been far away from England when Feyghine had first met the dancer, and he had never left off wondering at the spell—above all at the character of the spell—she had cast over his cousin. Then he had watched with surprise, and increasing concern, the gradual absorption of Feyghine's whole life in that of Joaquina; and twice he had made a determined, and at the time it had seemed a successful, effort to wrench the other away. But Feyghine each time had come back, not only ready, but eager, to be enslaved anew.

At last Domville had accepted the situation with the kind of angry toleration with which a man accepts a condition of things which could never in any circumstances be his own. He was well aware that, had he had the misfortune to be attracted by such a woman as Joaquina the dancer had soon proved herself to be, the result would have been a short-lived, violent passion, of which he would, even at the height of his madness, have had the grace to be ashamed, and to which he would have looked back, when memory thrust the recollection upon him, with disgust and surprise at his own weakness.

There was another, and a more personal, reason

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why Domville disliked the dancer. He had, for long years, been Feyghine's only confidant during the constantly recurring spasms of jealousy which possessed and shook the Russian as might have done one of those mysterious aguish fevers, which men bring back from deadly southern swamps. For it had been Paul Feyghine's fate to see a series of other men, one after the other, taken, possessed, adored by Joaquina, as he himself had been for the space of a few magic weeks. That they each also, in time, found themselves forsaken, cast out, and finally treated to that worst of sentimental insults, forgetfulness, was no consolation, for lover-wise Paul always believed that in each of his successors the woman he loved had found her master. As for Feyghine's own peculiar, and apparently permanent, relation to Joaquina, he owed the fact of his survival partly to the fine, unselfish quality of his love, partly to the pouring out at her feet week by week, month by month, and at last year by year, of his vast wealth.

And then, before very long, there had come what seemed to Domville the terrible and perplexing, but to Paul himself the heaven-sent, problem of the child. Nicolette had formed a permanent, if to Joaquina a singularly embarrassing and unwished-for, link between the dancer and Feyghine.

Joaquina was quite unaware of how Francis Domville regarded her; the invariable if cold courtesy with which he treated her flattered her vanity, and the fact that her witcheries had always left him unmoved even gave him a certain prestige in her eyes. On each of the two occasions when he had detached Feyghine from her grip, she had been, if anything, grateful; and, as a matter of fact, Domville had acquired an uncomfortable suspicion that, had she not herself played into his hands, Feyghine would never have

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left her. Besides, the victory had remained with her, for how easily she had whistled him back to her side,—how eager Paul had been to return into willing slavery!

But all that was now old history. Joaquina held the Russian in her bonds more closely than she had ever done; and Domville could not doubt that had it been her desire, Feyghine, knowing all, and ever suspecting far more than he knew, would have married her.

All these things Domville to-night remembered with anger and a curious sense of defilement; it was horrible that he should have been compelled to come straight from Sabine to Joaquina, and so he made a determined effort to banish Sabine from his thoughts, and for a few moments he completely succeeded.

Then, suddenly, there swept in from the garden a wind laden with sweet and subtle night scents given out by freshly turned earth and sleeping flowers, and Domville's face grew rigid as there rose before him an intensely vivid vision of the far away, moonlit rose garden at Gaynesford; there, exactly at this time last night, he had held Sabine for a moment in his arms,—his lips had sought, and found, her tremulous, innocent mouth. . . .

At last, it might have been a moment, it might have been an hour later, for Domville had lost all reckoning of time, there came a discreet knock on the nail-studded door. He wheeled round with a feeling of relief; here, doubtless, was the Grand Duke, and with him the welcome need for some sort of action.

Old Gregor stepped noiselessly forward from the servants' quarters,—there was a pause, a fumbling with the big iron bolt which had taken the place of a more modern lock, and then, instead of the huge burly presence Domville expected to see, there came forward,

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to his measureless astonishment, two figures shrouded, the one in a black, the other in a white, domino-like opera cloak. Now each of these graceful and peculiar garments was unpleasantly familiar to Francis Domville, for he had put these cloaks on, and taken them off, their fair wearers many a time during the last few months. Thus there was no need for him to wait until first the white and then the black lace hood were thrown back; from the moment the shrouded figures had stood framed in the low square doorway, Domville had recognized in the taller of the two ladies who now stood opposite to him, his good friend and sometime ally, Mrs. Winfrith; while in her companion, he greeted, with scarcely concealed anger and surprise, Miss Rose Hassal.

The two ladies evidently wished to do all possible honour to Joaquina's supper party, for Mrs. Winfrith's plain black tulle gown set off the lustre of the wonderful jewels which were known to lovers of gems as the Wantley pearls. As to Miss Hassal, her frock had the quaint touch of originality always noticeable in everything worn by her, and to-night her white dress, cut straight across the shoulders only a few inches below her determined, pointed little chin, made her look like some rather impish angel stepped straight from an Italian primitif.

For a moment Mrs. Winfrith and her companion seemed even more disconcerted than was Domville himself. Certain human juxtapositions are always surprising the intelligent by their utter unexpectedness; and to both Penelope Winfrith and Rose Hassal, there seemed no possible link between Francis Domville, the impoverished Catholic owner of Gaynesford, and Joaquina the dancer. Then, with feminine quickness of apprehension, they both simultaneously recalled the fact that Domville was the cousin and housemate of Paul

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Feyghine, the godson of the personage they were to meet to-night.

Doubtless Feyghine was now in non-official attendance on his godfather, and so had managed to include Domville in the company brought together to meet the old man of whom Rose Hassal retained such a pleasant memory. Making his Highness' acquaintance had almost repaid the girl for what had perhaps been the most unpleasant experience connected with her London life. So she had been delighted at the thought of meeting the Grand Duke again,—were not she and Jack Barton going to St. Petersburg next year? Still, the fact that Domville was to be present at the amusing bohemian supper party was certainly annoying, and threatened to spoil what had promised a good deal of amusement.

Mrs. Winfrith was the first of the three wholly to recover her self-possession. "I hope we are not late, but my coachman lost his way. What a wonderful, strange old place! Is it really as mediæval as it looks? How did the Señorita ever discover it? It might be a bit of old Nuremberg!"—and as she spoke she passed on into the garden where Joaquina was impatiently waiting for her remaining and most important guests.

Domville, filled with feelings of repugnance and anger which he would have found it difficult to analyse, waited silently until it should be Miss Hassal's pleasure to speak.

"Well, well!" she said at last, "if there's one place in the world I shouldn't have expected to meet you, it would have been here,—to-night! I thought you were hundreds of miles away! There's hardly anyone left in town,—I'm staying with Mrs. Winfrith till next week; I hope you'll come and see us."

"I've been away," said Domville shortly, "I only came back to-day, and I'm going off again to-morrow."

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But as he spoke, Rose Hassal was looking round, peering through the door giving into the garden with quick, eager eyes. "Where's your cousin?" she asked, "I mean Mr. Feyghine? Oh! I see; the Grand Duke hasn't arrived yet; I suppose Mr. Feyghine is bringing him?"

"My cousin," answered Domville, "will not be here to-night,"—and he averted his eyes from her eager, upturned face, shocked at what he took to be her ungirlish and surely overfrank recognition of the tie binding Feyghine and Joaquina. But in this he did Miss Hassal a cruel wrong; she had never heard the names of the dancer and of Paul Feyghine coupled together. To Domville, however, her words bore but one interpretation, and he felt a sense of acute repulsion, almost of horror, at the thought of how nearly the girl standing by his side had become his wife.

"Why there's Mr. Rivers! I must go and speak to him,"—Rose Hassal turned and left Domville with an air of obvious, rather exaggerated, relief. "How absurd he was!" she thought to herself, "how prudish and *vieux jeu!* As if a girl couldn't go *anywhere* with Penelope Winfrith. Why should men arrogate the sole right of amusing themselves at such an affair as this was to be? There was no harm in the dear old Grand Duke; he, she felt sure, would be delighted to see her again. As to the others,—well, Mireille Lyons, till to-day her fellow-guest in Mrs. Winfrith's house, was perfectly 'straight'; doubtless Joaquina was the same,—they were working women as well as great artists." It sometimes suited Miss Hassal to remember that her own mother had been a mill-hand, and to do her justice, she was not in the least ashamed of the fact. "Such women,"—so she went on debating with herself, during her leisurely transit to that part of the garden where Rivers was standing talking to Maudie

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O'Farrell,—"such women were far more likely to be 'straight' than were some of the smart ladies in whose company Francis Domville had often been charmed to meet her in the past!"

Still, even so, Rose Hassal remembered, with a curious pang, the look of contempt, almost of aversion, which had come over the set face, the determined, sarcastic mouth, when she had asked, and when he had answered, that very natural question regarding Paul Feyghine. She turned for consolation to James Rivers who was now smiling down at her, and concealing, with perfect success, his deep astonishment at meeting her there. Nor was his surprise diminished by the young lady's first remark,—"I had no idea Mr. Domville knew Joaquina; I suppose he has come here with Mr. Feyghine, who is a godson of the Grand Duke Paul."

But Rivers, being an older and doubtless a wiser man than Francis Domville, made no mistake as to Rose Hassal's meaning; as he looked into her clear eyes he saw that she knew nothing of the private life of the woman to whose house she had been brought, and he felt indignant with Paul Feyghine for having allowed her to be invited to Joaquina's supper party. All he said was: "I understand that Mr. Feyghine was prevented at the last moment from coming to-night, and his cousin is taking his place."

Rose Hassal turned and gave a long look at Domville's distant figure, now standing half in and half out of the low door leading from the hall to the garden. "Mr. Domville doesn't look very festive, does he?" she exclaimed, and then, as Mrs. Winfrith came and stood by them, "We were speaking of Mr. Domville, Penelope; it seems that Mr. Feyghine arranged this supper-party for his godfather, but something has prevented his being here to-night, so his cousin has come instead."

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"Domville certainly looks as if something had thoroughly annoyed him," said Rivers with some surprise. "But you see the Grand Duke's rather late, and Domville's a very impatient man." He turned to Mrs. Winfrith, "If I may quote the latest piece of French slang,—'il fait son petit Louis Quatorze!'"

"H'm, that's rather funny!"—a smile lit up for a moment Penelope Winfrith's beautiful if rather worn face, "but he won't have to wait much longer," she added after a moment, "for there, surely, *is* the Grand Duke."

A burly form, so broad that its owner's great height was scarcely apparent, now blocked up the door where Domville had stood, his dark figure silhouetted against the lighted hall, a moment before; and Miss Hassal, concealed Dryad-wise in the shadow of a tree, smiled secretly, radiantly, at the Grand Duke. This agreeable personage would prove a very useful, as well as a very pleasant acquaintance, when she and Jack Barton went to Russia next year; and again Rose told herself, just as she had done in Madame Feyghine's drawing-room, how exactly his appearance to-night recalled one of those tall, broad, stuffed figures which stand round the Tsar at Madame Tussaud's waxworks. True, the Grand Duke to-night was not in uniform; but even in ordinary evening dress he looked a size larger, a thought more imposing, than most other men are, and there was something fictitious in the fixed red colour spread over his fat smooth cheeks, in his heavy dyed moustache with the fiercely erect waxed ends, even in his domed, shining head, framed in curling grey hair.

At last the Grand Duke stepped out on to the gravel path; there he stood looking about him with bright, bead-like eyes, which, turning this way and that, scanned sharply the shadowy-looking figures moving slowly hither and thither under the lantern-hung trees.

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Beckoning to a short, slight man who had stood, till now, just behind him, his Highness suddenly indicated with a nod the tall, graceful figure of Mrs. Winfrith. "Stassulvitch!" he exclaimed rather sharply, "Qui est cette belle personne?"

The Russian diplomatist looked up and across the little lawn now touched into vivid green by the electric light shining from the tower, then he answered quietly, —"Cette dame, Altesse, est Madame Winfrith; son mari est Sécretaire d'État des Indes."

"Donc, une femme du monde?"

"Mais oui, Altesse, une femme du monde," and the attaché shrugged his shoulders, as though to imply that he really couldn't be held responsible for an English lady's vagaries.

"Tiens, tiens! Oh! ces Anglaises!"—words failed the Grand Duke; then he added suspiciously, "J'espère toutefois qu'on ne va pas la fourrer à côté de moi!"

"Oh non, Altesse. Je viens d'étudier le plan de la table; votre Altesse est à côté de la maitresse de maison, de Joaquina,"—the speaker held up, and peered closely at the paper which Gregor had handed to him, "et puis il y a à gauche de votre Altesse une certaine Mees—Mees 'Assal——"

"'Assal?" repeated the Grand Duke crossly, "Connais pas! Qu'est que c'est que ca—'Assal?"

Now the attaché in his progress through the London world had certainly heard of Miss Hassal, but to-night the name suggested nothing to him. Still, it was all important to him to keep his personage in good humour, so—"Une bien gentille petite femme, Altesse," he said calmly.

"Tant mieux," replied the Grand Duke with a rather ogreish smile, "car je m'embêtes joliment depuis que je suis à Londres!"

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CHAPTER XX

As late I came through Lewis Woods
A 'Possum passed me by:
He curled his tail and feared the Lord,
But *how* he girned at I!

JOAQUINA'S supper-party was well under way; and already the subdued murmur of voices running round the table was becoming less low, less restrained. The Grand Duke himself had given the signal by a sudden burst of chuckling laughter, but to Joaquina's chagrin the Imperial mirth had not been excited by one of her own witty or clever guests, but by a whispered interchange of words with old Gregor.

Gregor, resplendent in his red caftan, stood straight and lank behind his Highness' chair, waiting on him as assiduously as an eastern devotee waits on his heathen god,—and the old soldier, emboldened by the sound of the home language, by the familiar "thee" and "thou," had ventured to recall an incident of his own and the Grand Duke's long past youth. It concerned one of the few really funny, if rather Rabelaisian, incidents, which had enlivened the Holy War of 'seventy-seven. The Grand Duke Paul, then a dashing young officer, famous for his reckless bravery and invariable good temper, had been the hero of the story. Ah! how good it had been to be young, and capable of finding amusement in so childish and innocent a fashion!

The old man looked round the oval table with an

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instinctively human desire to share his mirth, but his face fell,—not one of these cold-looking men and women, with the one possible exception of the Frenchwoman, Mireille Lyons, would feel anything but sheer disgust at the excellent joke!

The Grand Duke asked himself dolorously whether he was about to be bored; this affair did not promise to be as lively as were the Parisian theatrical supper-parties at which, as he assured himself, he was each winter so welcome a guest.

Then he happily turned his shrewd eyes towards his left-hand neighbour. What was her name? Ah! yes, Mees 'Assal. She was a clever-looking girl with her fair hair cut quaintly à la Titus across her forehead, and her white lace gown had evidently been designed by some costumier who knew his business, for while it cunningly concealed what was least attractive in the thin, still unformed figure, it revealed the charming, dimpled shoulders of its wearer. With this rather piquant-looking creature the Grand Duke seemed already to possess some pleasant association; her peculiar and penetrating tone of voice recalled to him some agreeable and amusing episode. Unfortunately he could not remember when he had seen her before. Just now she was evidently trying to make conversation with her sullen-looking neighbour, Mr. Tom Hacking.

The Grand Duke's sudden loud laughter had roused the attention of Maudie O'Farrell; and she was now looking at him with the candid, terribly critical, eyes of a very young girl. Of all the people present, with the possible exception of Domville, Maudie was the least affected by her nearness to Joaquina's royal guest; those about her would have been very much surprised had they known that her fearlessness, her lack of awe,

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were partly owing to the fact that in her heart she thought herself of the same rank as himself,—had not her mother often told her that she was descended from the Kings of Ireland?

While picking daintily at the stuffed quail on her plate, Maudie O'Farrell had been engaged in two very different mental occupations. One portion of her mind was taking notes of this to her novel and amusing scene, in order that later she might describe it in her next letter to her own particular favourite among the younger nuns in the convent school which she had only left last term. The rest of her mind was absorbing the idiosyncrasies and oddities of those who sat round her, so that she might rehearse Joaquina's supper-party to her admiring parents the next morning.

After a good long stare, more or less concealed by Maudie's long, dark Irish eyelashes, she averted her eyes from the Grand Duke, registering, with a faint feeling of disgust, the fact that he embodied, as no human being she had ever yet seen had done, the deadly sin of gluttony,—the way he handled his knife and fork, the way he ate, the way he drank, made Maudie feel rather sick, but each repulsive item lent itself admirably to her peculiar gift. Then the child's conscience began to reprove her; the Grand Duke had spoken very kindly to her, in fact she knew that she owed her presence here to-night to his having specially asked that she might be invited, and so Maudie made up her mind that his Highness should only be mimicked in the strictest family privacy.

She did not linger long over her next neighbour but one,—that is, over her hostess; but her eyes, trained of late to notice and observe everything, became aware that the dancer looked far from happy. Maudie wondered why; everything seemed to be going very well, and the Grand Duke was now engaged, during the

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intervals of what Maudie felt must really be called gobbling, in a lively conversation with Miss Hassal. As for the Satellite, the only thing worthy of imitation in his otherwise colourless personality was a curious way he had of craning his long neck. The author of "William-Tell-It-All" who treated her—or so at least Maudie thought—alternately as though she was a baby and an old lady, was not worth much thought; neither was Doris Seymour; and Maudie also passed over the small, impassive Russian gentleman who had come with the Grand Duke. Beyond him sat Mireille Lyons, and on the Frenchwoman the girl concentrated her vision. Here if you like was someone worth looking at, and worth studying! Just now Maudie's most popular turn was that of "taking off" Mireille in the most famous and—although poor Maudie did not know it—the most *macabre* and suggestive of her French songs; Mireille had lent herself good-naturedly to the business, and Maudie felt very grateful to her.

The child's eyes softened as they rested on Francis Domville's reserved and self-absorbed face; she knew nothing of him, except that he was a Catholic, descended from one of the Elizabethan martyrs mentioned in her favourite story-book, "Wild Times," but this was a strong link indeed. As for Mr. Rivers,—well, no one could help liking Mr. Rivers, he was so funny and kind; Maudie felt rather cross that she had not been placed between him and Mr. Domville, instead of between the Satellite and that tiresome Johnny Pinke. She instinctively passed over Mrs. Winfrith, and her thoughts leaped to Phœbe Holl, a very "good sort," difficult to imitate because she was as changeable as a chameleon: on the other hand, the American's strong, resonant accent, and her quaint turns of speech, made her an almost too easy victim. It would be rather amusing to imagine an interchange of talk between Phœbe Holl

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and Mr. Rivers, for the latter talked—or Maudie thought he did—in a very finicking, mincing fashion.

Then came Tom Hacking—and Maudie quickly withdrew her gaze from the other side of the table, for she suddenly became aware that the soap millionaire's eyes were now just fixed on herself with a curious, disagreeable, ruminative stare. She wondered, with hot cheeks, why Joaquina had asked such a horrid, bold-looking fellow to her party; still, in common with most of those present, she was aware that Hacking was one of the owners of the theatre to which she, Maudie, was now drawing such large audiences each evening; and this invested him with a certain interest in her eyes.

Travelling on to Hacking's neighbour, Maudie, for the second time in her survey of her fellow-guests, felt herself quite at a loss; in a sense Miss Hassal stood to her for society with a big "S," for whenever Maudie obtained what she called a "drawing-room engagement" this young lady was sure to be among the guests, and sure also to come up and say a few good-natured, lively words to the famous little mimic. She occupied, therefore, a very distinct niche in Maudie O'Farrell's imagination, and yet of all the women now present Miss Hassal would certainly be the hardest to "take off," for there was nothing to catch hold of in her polished, sparkling personality.

Maudie was not the only human being sitting at Joaquina's table who was busily engaged in watching and in coming to conclusions concerning those about her. In some ways the least preoccupied and the least contented among the women present was the hostess herself. Joaquina felt neglected,—in a sense insulted,—by the personage in whose honour she was giving this festivity; for the Grand Duke, after paying her a number of brief, formal compliments, had wholly devoted him-

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self to the double task of eating the excellent supper placed before him, and flirting with Miss Hassal.

As was always the case with the dancer when she felt angry or miserable, she longed for the soothing, adoring presence of Feyghine; and now she was engaged in asking herself, with angry petulance, why he was not here to-night, sitting by her side, instead of that stupid Satellite, who only made matters worse by his looks of concern and sympathy.

Opposite Joaquina and the Grand Duke, Mrs. Winfrith was being entertained quite as much as she had expected to be; Domville had told her all sorts of curious and interesting things about the wonderful strange place where she found herself to-night,—and from this old house to Gaynesford the transition had been easy; each felt in good humour with the other, for Penelope was showing herself, as she always did with Domville, sympathetic and charming. Mr. Rivers, who sat on her other side, had also amused Penelope, though in a very different fashion, for he possessed the rather rare gift of facile, witty conversation.

As for Rivers himself, this kind of affair was all in the day's work; but he really enjoyed meeting such a beautiful and cultivated person as was Mrs. Winfrith, though, in his heart of hearts, he did not approve of her presence here to-night, and still less of that of Miss Hassal. He could also have dispensed with Tom Hacking. The soap millionaire was "out of the picture"; he was not even eating, but sat silent, crumbling the bread which lay under his large, flabby hand, while with his small, bloodshot eyes, he fixed one after another of the women present with a long, rather pathetically hungry, stare.

Of those present the most self-possessed, the most thoroughly at ease, of Joaquina's guests, was Miss Rose

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Hassal,—or so she appeared to everyone except to Mireille Lyons.

Long before to-night Mireille had singled out Miss Hassal for special observation. The girl who had been for the last few days her fellow-guest in the Winfriths' great, solitary town house, puzzled and attracted the French singer, for Rose Hassal was unlike any young woman Mireille Lyons had ever met. Daringly free in her conversation, she was yet, as Mireille had soon discovered, curiously innocent of evil,—always completely at ease and sure of herself, yet not always well-bred,—very good-natured, overflowing with the milk of human kindness, and yet, from Mireille's point of view, utterly lacking in heart.

To-night the French singer was sitting between two men who did not interest her in the least, and so, as she had nothing better to do, she looked slant-wise across the table, and closely studied Rose Hassal. She observed first that the young lady's blue eyes were just now fixed obstinately on her plate; and secondly, that Miss Hassal was listening to the Grand Duke with an uncomfortable, doubtful smile hovering over her small face. "Tiens, tiens, ce gros radis,"—for so Mireille in her own mind unceremoniously dubbed the Grand Duke,—"commence à embêter la pauvre petite! Est-ce qu'il sait seulement que c'est une vraie jeune fille,—une femme du monde?"

Alas! the Grand Duke was quite unaware, either that Rose Hassal was "une vraie jeune fille" or, in Mireille's sense, "une femme du monde," and it never occurred to him to treat his piquant young neighbour as either the one or the other. Alone among the women present,—and the Grand Duke prided himself on being a connoisseur,—Rose Hassal provided the one touch of the unexpected, the enigmatic, which always appeals so powerfully to a personage. For your personage has to

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pay his footing in this nicely balanced world by living strictly according to rule,—not for him the joys of going out in the highways and hedges, not for him the exhilaration of meeting with true adventure; even his pleasures are, as it were, standardized.

From the Grand Duke's point of view, each of the women here to-night, with the supreme exception of his left-hand neighbour, was true to type; he divined Miss Hassal to be something of a "sport," and as such worthy of his closest attention. His Highness could not help wondering what special gift had led to her being one of Joaquina's guests here to-night. Did she sing?—did she act? In any case, she looked, and evidently was, still quite young, and the Grand Duke was by now one of those Epicureans who might well echo Sainte-Beuve's sinister remark, "I may like chicken, even if chicken does not like me."

The unerring memory which is cultivated from earliest childhood in every royal personage, made his Highness conscious that he had seen Miss Hassal before, but to his vexation he could not remember where their meeting had taken place. Instead of asking her the plain question, which might have taken her by surprise, and so provoked a true answer, he cunningly observed, "It is a long time since I last had the felicity of meeting you,—so long, indeed, that I cannot remember, dear Mees 'Assal, whether it was in Petersburg, Paris, or perhaps even Aix?"

Rose looked up, rather eagerly; she had come to this supper-party determined to achieve the conquest of the agreeable personage she had met in Madame Feyghine's drawing-room, urged thereto by natural coquetry, and by a shrewd desire to further Jack Barton's business interests in Russia; but something in the old man's look of bold admiration,—something in the way he leant down towards her, made her suddenly, nervously aware that

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she had perhaps made a mistake in coming to this bohemian supper-party. Only a short half hour before, Miss Hassal had told herself that a girl could go anywhere with Penelope Winfrith; but she now realized, with something very like fear knocking at her heart, that Penelope Winfrith, as a matter of fact, could go to many places from which Rose Hassal would do well to stay away. For one thing,—so the Grand Duke's neighbour now remembered,—Mrs. Winfrith was at least fifteen years older than herself, and, further, she had a manner which assuredly would give pause to the most on-coming, the most impertinent of Imperial Highnesses; this manner Rose sincerely admired, but she was far too clever to suppose she would be able to imitate it, now, at once, at a moment's notice.

Thus it was that, as Miss Hassal met the Grand Duke's familiar, caressing glance,—a glance that seemed to sear her, as he moved his big, heavy body rather more closely to her dimpled shoulder and slender right arm, the vision of this great personage as helpful friend and respectful admirer died once for all; and Rose even caught herself hoping that she and Jack Barton would not come across him during their visit to Russia.

"I think, sir, that you must have confused me with someone else," she said composedly, "I am sure that we have never met before——"

"—That," exclaimed the Grand Duke, rather piqued, "is impossible, for I never forget a face, far less such a charming face as yours, dear Mees!"—and again Rose, swept by that curious feeling of terror and shrinking, felt herself seared by the old man's measuring glance, travelling imperceptibly down from her fair hair to her tremulous mouth, and from her mouth to her shoulders.

It was after this that Miss Hassal, for a while, kept her eyes obstinately fixed on her plate.

"I have never been to St. Petersburg," she said at

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last, trying to make her voice sound gay and unconcerned, "and not even to Aix! I am quite sure that this is the first time, sir, that we have met; in this one matter I venture to think I am likely to know best!"

Rose was making a valiant effort to conquer her perhaps unreasonable repugnance; she told herself that the Grand Duke doubtless took her for an artiste,—such a woman, for instance, as was Mireille Lyons, who could certainly be trusted to hold her own with anyone, and to keep her self-possession anywhere. And so, as she spoke, a wavering smile came over her charming mouth, still full of the soft curves of early youth, and she repeated half mechanically, "It would be, as I say, sir, quite impossible for me to forget our having met before;" and perhaps the very fact that Miss Hassal was not accustomed to lying gave a ring of truth to her untrue words.

The Grand Duke pulled his big moustache; he meditatively twisted the long waxened ends, and made them assume a peculiarly conquering air. It was, of course, just possible that this—no, not exactly pretty, but certainly uncommon and attractive young creature had never seen him; but in that case, why was his persistency concerning the trifling matter of whether they had or had not met before, so evidently disagreeable to her? The answer probably was that he had met her,—but in the company of someone she now wished to forget. The Grand Duke noted the costly simplicity of Rose's white gown, the beauty of the old Brussels net draping the bodice, the lustre of the pearl-headed pins keeping that lace in place; and so, concerning certain episodes in Miss Hassal's past, his Highness came to an appallingly wrong conclusion.

There followed a long pause between the courses; the Grand Duke's favourite dish, *écrevisses à l'Américaine*, was just about to be served. Oh! how ardently

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Rose Hassal longed to see her neighbour do his duty, that is, turn and pay court to his hostess, who sat neglected, and sulkily silent on his other side ; but his Highness to-night was determined to forget duty, and even that civility which is the tact of princes. Still, Miss Hassal for a moment breathed more freely, for her august if trying neighbour was looking round the oval table scanning each of those present with a steady, meditative look.

Accordingly Rose ventured to lift her head . . . and she was just about to speak to Tom Hacking, who surely had a right to some of her conversation, when she suddenly felt one of the hands lying in her lap seized, squeezed, and softly, rhythmically patted, by what seemed to be a large, hot paw—

Now Rose Hassal possessed a natural purity of nature, an instinctive personal fastidiousness, which had certainly been among the reasons why she had won the liking of Francis Domville, in days which now seemed so long ago to them both. Her freedom of manner, even her freedom of speech, never degenerated into a lack of modesty, and to her the word flirtation meant a very different thing from what it did to many of her quieter and more demure-looking contemporaries. So it was that she now suddenly felt far more anger, and even far more surprise, than some of those same contemporaries might have done had they been sitting, in her place, next the Grand Duke Paul.

—Under her lowered eyelids, she gave a piteous, hunted glance round the table, but only Mireille Lyons, sitting far away, guessed something of what was taking place ; what she guessed made the Frenchwoman mutter to herself with a scoffing, half-pitying smile, " Pauvre petite ! Mais que de bruit pour rien !" But Miss Hassal had no intention of making much

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ado about nothing; another girl, feeling as she now felt, might have risen from the table, giving one of any half-dozen pretexts, but there was a worldly-wise strain in Rose's nature which made her at once determine not to risk an *esclandre*. Instead, she told herself that, having come here, there was now nothing to be done but to set her teeth, and go through with it. She had been foolish enough to suppose that a personage must be, as a matter of course, a gentleman; she was now undeceived, but she felt it would be as well to keep her new knowledge to herself.

Then she breathed more freely, for the Grand Duke suddenly withdrew his large, heavy hand from over hers. A peculiarly delicious, and to him as yet unknown, dish had just been handed round, and he was far too humane to deprive anyone, least of all a pretty young woman, of her just share of the dainty. For a moment, therefore, Miss Hassal enjoyed a respite.

Then suddenly something occurred, so utterly, so preposterously unexpected, that Rose nearly cried out aloud, for her slender arched foot—Rose had always been proud of her beautiful feet—was seized, and the shoe pulled off it; in another moment her toes were being patted much as her hand had been a few minutes before. "Quel charmant, quel adorable petit pied!" whispered her tormentor,—and then, it must be confessed to Rose's great surprise, her shoe was as cleverly replaced on her foot as if her maid's hands had slipped it on, only, however, for the same extraordinary pantomime to be repeated, not once, but half a dozen times.

Now this trick of pulling off, and what is of course far more difficult, of putting on again, a woman's slipper, had been one of the Grand Duke's most cherished accomplishments in the far-off, happy days of his early youth, and quite a long time had gone by

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since he had cared to try and see whether his toes still kept their cunning.

To-night's success put him in high good-humour. "Non-da!" he murmured, "you did not think the Grand Duke Paul was so clever, eh? There was a time when I could lift a cup and drink out of it with my foot, and that with all imaginable grace; the idea was suggested to me by a poor girl who was born without arms, and to whom my beloved mother gave a pension. But you are not eating, dear Mees? Was it not your great Byron who said he could not bear to see a woman eat? Boje-moi! What an inhuman fellow! As for me, I delight in seeing people, and especially young ladies, happy!"—and again Rose felt her foot seized, and once more she was subjected to what was to her a very real if grotesque form of torture. . . .

And then at last,—it seemed a very long time to Miss Hassal,—there came a move; Joaquina, instead of waiting as in duty bound for the Grand Duke's signal, rose and pushed her chair aside with a petulant gesture. The moment had now come for which the dancer had been waiting all the evening; in a few minutes she would be the centre of attraction, and the cynosure of those Imperial eyes which had till now so oddly neglected her for that fair, thin girl brought by Mrs. Winfrith. But now she would triumph; very soon the Grand Duke would have eyes for no one but herself; Joaquina knew that her dancing possessed a strange magnetic quality, she had never known a member of her audience resist the influence——

While the chairs which had been round the supper table were being quickly re-arranged so as to form a straight line across the low balcony which had been temporarily erected just outside the window, the company broke up into little groups, and Rose Hassal,

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hardly knowing what she was doing, moved across the room and stood, a shamed wrathful light in her eyes, next to Mrs. Winfrith.

Then from the garden there came strains of soft, plaintively tuneful music; and for a moment everyone hung back waiting for the Grand Duke to pass to his seat.

But his Highness had no intention of being baulked of his prey. "Where is my delightful neighbour, Mees —ah! yes—Mees 'Assal?" he inquired, when about to sink heavily into his armchair which formed the centre of the semi-circle; and Rose felt herself led, even propelled, forward by those about her. "Place yourself there, dear Mees,"—the Grand Duke indicated the chair to his right; then, at last, mindful of what was expected of him,—"and will not Mees Maudie O'Farrell come and sit by me also?" and the little mimic also came forward, and sat herself down, very composedly, on his Highness' other side.

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CHAPTER XXI

Je suis un homme de mon siècle, ballotté d'une théorie à l'autre, ne sachant plus guère à quoi il faut croire, ni bon ni mauvais, plutôt bon, quand l'occasion se présente. Je respecte les femmes qui se respectent et je profite de celles qui se méprisent . . . ce n'est pas moi qui ai créé le monde, je le prends comme il est.

AND then Joaquina danced. . . . Her slim exquisite figure, instinct with swaying grace, was outlined with Tanagra sharpness against the natural background formed by the leafy trees of the Tower garden; and as she danced, seeming to lead, rather than obey, the strains of music which came from a string band concealed to the left of the little stage, certain members of her audience felt a strange stirring in their hearts; the pulse of life beating for a few moments more strongly, with keen, dolorous apprehension of past joy and pain.

To the Grand Duke the strange poetic beauty of the scene, the delicate poignant notes floating on the still night air, caused to rise up before him a woman he had nearly succeeded in completely forgetting. This was the mother of his aide-de-camp, a lady now living a life of solitary asceticism on her late husband's estates near Moscow.

She was the only human being the Grand Duke Paul had loved with a passion which had been, in the measure possible to such a man, pure and ideal in its essence; and she also had loved him, but with a far purer and more ideal love than his for her.

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For a while she had resisted him, dreaming maybe of such a platonic tie as had contented the Imperial lover of Madame de Krudener; but the Grand Duke Paul was a very different type of man to his grandfather, and on the eve of that war during which he, Gregor, and Paul Feyghine's father had been good comrades in arms, she had yielded,—only, however, to follow what she had done by an amazing thing, one of those things that only women do when tempted by their good angels.

On her lover's departure for the seat of war, this woman who loved the Grand Duke Paul had vowed that if he came back safe, if he was preserved from harm, she would only see him once more, and that to say good-bye. So it was that on his return the conquering hero had found all his happiness and pride dashed by a tragic happening, for in spite of his anger, and of their mutual anguish, she kept her vow,—and so the Grand Duke Paul's one not wholly ignoble passion had been among those rare loves which have a sudden ending, and no gradual, mournful loosening of a once ever strengthening tie.

How amazed Miss Hassal, trembling with anger and disgust, would have been could she have read the heart of the man sitting next to her!

Penelope Winfrith, staring with her sombre blue eyes into the darkness, felt, perhaps more than any of those present, the wonderful beauty and perfection of Joaquina's dancing; and with her also the sight she saw, and the music she heard, turned her mind unconsciously to a human being whom she was, as a rule, quite successful in banishing from her thoughts.

There rose up before her with vivid clearness the vision of a garden, ill-cared for and deserted, but oh! how full of warmth and colour, stretching out behind a little inn in the mountains of Savoy; there she and a man she had dearly loved, drawn to one another by

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trembling, irresistible emotion, had kissed for the first time, and for a moment she had leant in his arms, looking up at him with piteous questioning eyes. He was now dead, had long been dead, and Penelope had even lived to be glad that he had died, but to-night, for one long moment, she would have given all the world to be again standing with him on the slopes of that mountain garden.

James Rivers also suddenly remembered a long dead human being belonging so completely to a remote portion of his earlier life that she had faded, merged in that background against whose variegated patchwork all men and women, once past early youth, are doomed to lead their lives. She was a girl to whom he had been engaged, and she had died during their engagement. The rather commonplace little tragedy belonged to the time when Rivers had been the high-spirited, hard-working son of a country parson. Later, he had sometimes wondered what existence would have meant to him had she lived, feeling, if such sad truth should be told, a certain sense of relief that his life had been ordered otherwise. But now, to-night, Rivers also would have given much to be able to travel back over the years, to find himself once more with his poor lost love.

Within a few yards of where Joaquina's guests were sitting, moved by such varying emotions, an invisible and unsuspected listener was also strangely affected by the knowledge that Joaquina was even now dancing to the strains of the music which floated so clearly out to him; Paul Feyghine, staring down at the pavement up and down which he was walking with slow measured steps, remembered the night he first met the dancer.

A Spaniard of his acquaintance, with whom he had gone to the theatre, had persuaded him to go behind the scenes. Paul saw rise before him the bare, white-

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washed dressing-room, quaintly decorated with pictorial advertisements connected with the dancer's triumphant career; he remembered the sudden leap of the pulses, the sensation of moved surprise, with which he had realized that the woman whose dancing was then drawing all the town, and who greeted him and his friend with so enchanting a smile, was quite young, and,—or so he had thought,—unspoilt, untarnished, by her great success.

From that moment, from the instant Fate had led Feyghine through the door of the dancer's dressing-room, a subtle relation had been established between them. Even now he was not conscious of how completely she had willed his subjection; even now he believed that, for some few weeks at least, he had been hunter and she quarry. True, Paul Feyghine had not long kept his first illusions concerning Joaquina, but from that night, when he had first seen her, onward to the present time, he had discovered in himself depths of complicated emotions which had amazed and even frightened him by their intensity; not love, not passion only, but very soon fierce jealousies, and together with these jealousies a power of long-suffering patience and forgiveness. For the exercise of patience and forgiveness—these two virtues are surely ever closely akin—Joaquina had soon given her Russian lover ample opportunities.

To-night the solitary watcher felt a horrible heart-breaking sense of spiritual and physical loneliness, and from the vision of his past fragmentary bliss with Joaquina, his mind took a long journey far further back, to the brief, busy years he had spent in Russia after he had become his own master, when he had formed a high and impossible ideal of what Russians, placed by God in the position of himself, were to do for their country.

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Then there came an absurd interruption to Paul Feyghine's self-communing and self-reproach, for he was suddenly tapped on the shoulder, and a moment later found him replying with good-humoured amusement to the questions showered down on him by the Scotland Yard detective whose at once onerous and dull duty it was to shadow the Grand Duke Paul during his stay in London.

But Joaquina was evidently not meant by what our prosaic ancestors—at once more believing and less reverent than are the men and women of this generation—unceremoniously called "Provy," to be really happy to-night. For all at once the electric light, which, as the dancer was rather bitterly aware, had been installed at a great deal of expense, and Joaquina always grudged the expenditure of any money not devoted directly to herself—went out.

The well-trained little audience remained quite still; most of those present were still under the spell of their hostess' dancing, and were not perhaps sorry to enjoy a few moments of peace and recollection before bidding good-bye to Joaquina; so they gazed patiently into the lantern-lit garden waiting for the light to come back. Alone the Satellite slipped from his chair with a feeling very like despair at his heart—for less than this the great Vatel had gone and hanged himself! He ran swiftly to the left of the garden, that is towards the servants' quarters, and all too soon for some of those sitting in the darkness in the balcony, there came the sound of hurrying footsteps, followed by the dim twinkling of candle-light.

It was just then that Miss Hassal, trembling with fright and repulsion, felt two huge arms enfolding her; the Russian Prince was indeed turning into a Russian bear, and what was even more terrifying, a talking bear, for—"You will come back with me, will you not?" the

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Grand Duke murmured, his lips brushing her ear, "My carriage is at your absolute disposal. We need not consider Stassulvitch,—he can climb up by the driver, or better still, walk back—for it is a fine night—to the Embassy. You are wearing some charming pearls, no doubt they are your favourite jewels? By great good fortune I have here in London a very fine black pearl—a unique one—that I will ask you to keep as a souvenir of this amusing evening, and of the Grand Duke Paul!"

Before Miss Hassal could in any way consider what answer she should make to this amazing proposal, the electric light flashed suddenly again into being: and, for a moment Rose thought she must have dreamed the suffocating terror which had filled her last few moments. Was it possible that she had imagined the sensation of those thick lips brushing her ear? For the Grand Duke, for the first time this evening, was turned quite away from herself, and she could hear him addressing some sugary compliment to little Maudie O'Farrell.

But no,—she had made no mistake; all too soon the broad back slowly turned round again. "Well?" he muttered, and then leaning towards her with what he believed to be a pleasant and tender smile, "Will you not come, dear Mees, and see the great black pearl?"

There was a moment's pause; then Rose looked at him quite straightly and simply, as she answered in her clear, high voice, "Thank you very much, sir, but I must go back, as I came, with Mrs. Winfrith. Perhaps you will allow us both to come one day and pay you our respects? Mrs. Winfrith, as you see, has herself some very splendid black pearls, and I am sure she would like—to see—your unique—specimen."

And then, as she uttered these last words, Miss Hassal suddenly felt that she could say no more, that she had come to the end of her endurance, of her pluck, of her dignity; in the bright light now beating

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down on her up-turned face, she turned ashen, and her lips began to twitch, her eyes to fill with tears.

"Mrs. Winfrith?—Oh, la! la!" Had the Grand Duke been an Englishman he would certainly have sworn under his breath; instead, he murmured to himself, "Boje-moi! Quelle gaffe! Oh! ces femmes du monde!—Oh! ces anglaises!—de vraies omelettes en surprise!"—and then he remembered—remembered with a feeling of dismay and shame, for, in spite of Rose's ideas on the subject, the Grand Duke Paul was, according to his lights, a gentleman,—where and when he had met this girl whose presence and whose voice had seemed so curiously familiar.

With horrid distinctness, there rose before his Highness Madame Feyghine's old-fashioned drawing-room, forming a background to a pink-clad, radiant little figure half kneeling before her grim hostess; he heard again the bright, high voice telling, with so much audacity and confidence, the absurd story which had so roused Madame Feyghine's ire, and so amused himself.

"It will be with great pleasure," he said,—speaking, alas! with a far greater change of tone, a far greater deference than he knew,—"that I shall welcome you and Mrs. Winfrith; as for to-night, I was, of course, joking; it is far too late to ask you both to come back to my hotel, though, as you doubtless know, in Petersburg we turn night into day. I will, therefore, arrange a collation, and I will ask Madame Stakhoff"—she was the Russian ambassadress, and happened to be still in London—"to come and pour out the tea."

Half an hour later, Mrs. Winfrith, who had drawn her hood well down over her eyes to shut out the rosy dawn which now flooded the deserted streets through which she and her companion were driving, sat up in her brougham, and spoke for the first time since they

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had left the tower. "Well, it was not wildly exciting, was it, Rose? I hope that you, at any rate, had a good time with your Grand Duke,—I thought him rather a tame old gentleman."

"I did find him rather tame," admitted Miss Hassal thoughtfully; "in fact he was much more amusing when I first met him at the Feyghines'; as it is, I don't feel at all anxious to see him again." She stopped speaking abruptly. Unlike Mrs. Winfrith, Rose had thrown back the hood of her cloak; she was staring out into the sunny, empty streets, and her fair little face had grown curiously wan and pinched; she felt shaken by a strange agueish feeling which seemed to make her at once hot and cold,—chilled, and yet longing for air. "By the way, I forgot to tell you,"—she half turned towards Mrs. Winfrith, "that I must go away to-day—for it *is* to-day, isn't it? I have changed my plans,—I can see father thinks I ought to go with him to Vichy, and so I've made up my mind to do it."

Her companion made no comment, but she felt rather surprised. Rose Hassal's relations to her father had always seemed more like those of a good-natured, wealthy client to his banker, than those of a child to an indulgent parent. Perhaps now, on the eve of her marriage, Miss Hassal was becoming more human.

There was a pause, and then—"I thought Joaquina herself looked horribly ill to-night," said Mrs. Winfrith abruptly.

"Yes, horribly ill," echoed the other absently.

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CHAPTER XXII

Roy ne puis, Prince ne daigne, Rohan suis.

IT was four o'clock on the day following the supper-party when Domville found himself at the porch of Gaynesford Presbytery.

In one sense, the twenty-four hours spent by him in London had broken the spell, given him time for rather anxious thought, and brought him sharply to his bearings. He knew that the period of time for which the Baroness meant to stay in England was drawing to a close, and he was determined to clear up as far as he possibly could the mystery with which she had chosen to encompass herself and her companion. He was keenly aware—and the knowledge had become increasingly irksome to him—that without the tacit complicity of the Baroness Karff all that had taken place during the last few weeks could never have happened. He was conscious that his fate and that of Sabine Reiffersberg—the two had in his mind become completely merged—were really in the Baroness's hands; and during the hours he had spent away from Gaynesford he had so far regained possession of himself as to resolve that he would provoke, and that at once, some definite explanation.

The uneasy suspicion that there was an ugly, perhaps even a sordid, mystery connected with the birth and parentage of the woman he loved with a complexity and jealous completeness which sometimes half dismayed

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him, had crystallized itself into a definite belief. Well, the sooner he knew and faced the facts, whatever they might be, the better for them both.

He had also that morning devoted a certain amount of thought to the question of ways and means. But, rather to his own surprise, this appeared to him, when looking at the future, comparatively unimportant. Sabine was no English girl,—no Rose Hassal, accustomed to everything that the possession of money can suggest. He believed her to be singularly simple in her tastes. Long ago,—for now three months back seemed very long ago,—living at Gaynesford had presented itself as a complicated and costly business, requiring not only a wife but a large income wherewith to entertain that wife's friends on a scale befitting the splendour of his beloved old house.

But now Domville wondered at his own past folly. He and Sabine would find themselves passing rich, living in one wing of Gaynesford Manor. There would be enough to provide her and himself with everything they were likely to want. He would get her the best horse that ever carried a lady, and they would need only a very simple household. Should they get tired of Gaynesford, but that seemed a remote possibility indeed, there would be enough for them to travel together,—what mattered as long as they were together?—to those countries she sometimes expressed a longing to see.

In this radiant, cloudless future Domville had mapped out for himself, the Baroness Karff was the one dark uncertain shadow. Sabine and that odd, imperious woman loved each other dearly; nay more, Sabine was curiously dependent on her guardian. But if it was true that there was no actual tie of blood between them, then he was determined to accept no gift of money, no present disguised as a dowry, from Sabine's

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adopted mother. It had been sufficiently intolerable to feel her always there, always in the background, almost always within earshot, during his singular wooing. He had become determined that the Baroness Karff should not be allowed to dominate his married life.

Fortunately she was a woman of wide interests, concerned in some form of active philanthropic work. The upper room of the summer-house where she spent many hours of each day, within earshot of her ward, saw a great deal of epistolary business carried on, as well as the eternal knitting which had got so much on Domville's nerves,—long letters written, and despatched each evening by her trusted major-domo with what Domville had thought a rather absurd pretence of secrecy and mystery. He had told himself that she probably "ran" some institution in Buda-Pesth or Vienna, the two towns of which she sometimes spoke with familiar knowledge. Through his sister, Anne Leycester, Domville had met such ladies and knew how busy these self-imposed tasks could keep them.

No, no! The Baroness Karff should keep her money, and he should keep his wife. She had more than once spoken to him as if money would buy everything, to say nothing of every man and every woman in the world, but she should soon learn that he, Francis Domville was not to be bought. However, in this matter he might indeed be running forward to meet trouble. The Baroness had been distinctly pleased to receive back her cheque from his lawyers; indeed, Domville had been diverted by her evident satisfaction. But now the ambiguous situation must end, and, as he travelled down from London, he told himself that he would speak to the Baroness that very day.

It was a hot, airless afternoon, and as Domville passed through into the presbytery he heard, issuing from the cool sitting-room where they had taken shelter from the

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great heat outside, the voices of the priest and of Mitroff raised in discussion; but when he opened the door of the room they both stopped speaking abruptly, and Domville had the instant disagreeable impression that the argument in which they were engaged concerned in some way himself.

"I suppose you have heard from the Baroness," said the priest at last. "She said she would write to you in London. Her decision seems to have been arrived at very suddenly,—in fact Blake tells me that the English servants knew nothing of her intention till about an hour before the ladies left Gaynesford."

"Left Gaynesford?" echoed Domville. "Surely you do not mean that they have gone away?" and he made no effort to conceal his surprise and chagrin.

"They left yesterday afternoon," said Father Copley quietly; and Dr. Mitroff, for once completely silent and offering no suggestion or explanation, looked inquisitively from the priest to Domville and from Domville to the priest. After a moment Father Copley went on speaking, as if anxious to give his friend time to recover from his discomfiture, for since his first exclamation and question Domville had said no further word.

"They received a telegram, one addressed, I believe, to the younger lady and saying, so I was told by the Baroness, that some relation of hers was leaving London rather unexpectedly and wished to see her before he left. As they were leaving Gaynesford, in any case, in a few days, they thought it simplest to advance their departure. But it is more than probable that she,—I mean of course the Baroness,—has left a letter for you with old Blake. She went down to the village and arranged for him to come up and take the keys."

"I'll go off and see him," said Domville; in the midst of his disturbance of spirit he yet noticed the

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Russian's unusual silence, and felt unreasonably irritated by it. Before leaving the room, he turned and, speaking with a determined lightness of manner, "I'm not so much surprised as you seem to be. I was afraid last week that the Baroness was getting bored; but still she might have told me of her intention."

After he had gone the priest said nothing for a few moments, and even Mitroff maintained his most unusual silence. But it was the Russian who at last spoke. "He is what you call here 'hard hit,'" he said, pensively.

A quarter of an hour later Domville was in the empty house, having been admitted by a lad whom the old servant had apparently left in charge while he went down to the village.

"Mr. Blake won't be long," said the boy, "he hadn't an idea you were coming down to-day, Sir."

Domville did not wish to question the boy,—for the matter of that, he did not wish to question Blake. On reflection he saw that it was unreasonable of him to be even surprised. In these days people make and unmake their plans with extraordinary rapidity. He would hear —he would certainly hear, probably within the next hour, whither the Baroness Karff and Sabine had betaken themselves.

As he walked through the great rooms which now seemed so singularly empty, he tried to reason away the uneasiness and even fear which had taken possession of him. The last time he had been here alone, as master, was the day he had received the Comte d'Albret, and the recollection of that interview and of its conclusion was far from being agreeable just now.

Suddenly, while moving despondently about the hall, which was now so closely, so intimately associated with Sabine Reiffersberg, for it was there, when indoors, that she had always preferred to be, he heard the sound

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of someone moving about in the drawing-room; he walked quickly across and opened the door—and there, to his infinite amazement and relief, stood, clad in her bonnet and cloak, the familiar figure of the Baroness Karff.

Domville was filled with swift resentment against the two men who had misled him. How could he have believed that even the older lady would leave Gaynesford without doing him the courtesy of saying good-bye? But now,—that is, on seeing that they were, after all, still here,—his determination to have a decisive explanation with the Baroness seemed no longer urgent. The one important thing in the world now was that he should see Sabine, feel Sabine's hand lying in his, see the look come into her blue eyes that he alone had the power to bring there. He told himself that Sabine must surely be waiting for him in the garden.

He drew back, as he had often done before when finding the Baroness Karff alone, but, instead of the satirical smile with which she had been wont of late to meet his half word of apology, she now called him to her, rather imperiously: "The Countess is not here," she said hurriedly, "I left her in London, but I thought it only correct to return in order to explain to you our sudden departure."

Domville came in and shut the door behind him without speaking. Then it was true that Sabine had gone, and without leaving him apparently a word of explanation or of farewell? He was keenly hurt, and what was more to the purpose angered. Well, the opportunity for which he had been seeking had now come. The Baroness should now tell him the whole truth.

"Come over here," she said sharply; and not for the first time Domville felt as if he had always known her, — as if even her harsh voice was unpleasantly familiar to his ears. "I have now not only to say

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good-bye, Mr. Domville, but to tell you something which I have no wish to keep from you any longer."

The young man walked over to where she had now sat down, and a stern, rather cold, expression came over his face; he thought he was going to hear the facts concerning Sabine's birth, to learn at last who she really was,—to be told perhaps the real story of the stranger whom the woman before him had compelled him to receive, and to whom he had felt himself in so equivocal, so odious a relation.

The Baroness Karff, glancing up into his face, began to wish that the interview were well over; but she did not doubt her power of bringing it to a conclusion which would prove, on the whole, much more satisfactory to the man standing before her than to herself.

"Sit down," she commanded, and then she added, "we have plenty of time, for I do not wish to be back in London before night."

But when Domville had unwillingly thrown himself into a chair, she did not seem in any great hurry to begin her story. "I should like to ask you," she said at last, "whether you remember certain events which immediately preceded your grandfather's death—events which closely concerned the two persons who lived in the house by the west lodge?" She stopped speaking and looked at him questioningly, and her fingers began to twist and untwist the fringe of the silk mantle she was wearing.

"Yes," answered Domville uneasily, "I know all about the circumstances to which you refer, in fact, though I was only nine years old, I remember——" then he stopped speaking, overwhelmed with mingled surprise, annoyance, and condemnation of his own blindness. How was it possible that he had not guessed the fact which had suddenly become so plain to him? He knew now only too well of whom the Baroness had

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always reminded him. Allowing for the difference of age, of figure, above all for the fact that the one had been plain and the other beautiful, this woman sitting here before him bore an amazing likeness to his aunt, Madame Feyghine.

"I know what you are going to tell me," he exclaimed, "and I ought to have guessed it before, for you are very very like my aunt,"—he hesitated, and added with a certain effort, "who is, of course, your half-sister."

"Now that you have guessed my secret, there remains very little to be told. But you may not know that it was thanks to Letty Feyghine that I first went abroad," said the Baroness drily. "One of the Russian Grand Duchesses, who had been brought up almost entirely by English nurses and governesses, had just married an Austrian Archduke, and she wanted an English reader, or dame de compagnie. Madame Feyghine was asked if she could recommend anyone, and she very good-naturedly suggested me,—without, I need hardly say, indicating our rather peculiar relationship. I suppose she thought it would be a good way of getting rid of me after my poor mother's death; and so it proved, for I have not since troubled any of you."

Domville was deeply stirred and moved by this unexpected confidence, but not as he would have been at the beginning of their acquaintance. This repugnant fact was, as far as he could see, quite unconnected with Sabine, and just now Sabine Reiffersberg was the one human being who mattered to him. Still, what he had just learnt divested the Baroness of some of the uneasy fear with which he had regarded her.

Now she was again speaking, and with a good deal of feeling in her voice: "I became very fond of my new mistress, but she did not live long; first her husband, to whom she was devoted, died, then two or three years

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later she died also. She begged me never to leave her only child. That child," said the Baroness Karff,—and again her fingers became busily engaged in plaiting and twisting the fringe of her mantle,—"is the young lady with whom you have become acquainted under the name of the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg."

Domville looked at her for a moment without speaking; she slowly raised her face—its expression, shamed, cunning, and yet triumphant, filled him with anger and perplexity. He got up, and walked to the door and back. "If this extraordinary story is true," he exclaimed, "then you have acted very wrongly—not only to me, but to her also!"

He turned away and stared out of the window. His mind was in a tumult of angry surprise and perplexity. He marvelled how he could have allowed himself to be so doubly fooled by this woman who now sat watching him with this odd, this inscrutable, expression on her pale face.

"Doubtless you will be amused to hear," he said, bitterly, "how very far I was from guessing the truth. I actually thought the Countess Sabine—you must forgive me for calling her by the only name by which I know her—was illegitimate, nameless. I actually believed that I was to be King Cophetua, and she, my beloved," —his voice broke for a moment,—"beggar maid. The rôles are reversed, it seems, and with a vengeance."

The Baroness looked up at the tall figure of the man now standing within the embrasure of the window; she thought to herself that her task was not going to be so very easy, after all, but she was about to fight for one far dearer to her than anything else in the world, dearer even than her own pride and ambition. "I admit I was wrong, very wrong, to keep you in ignorance so long, but there were other reasons—we'll come to them presently,—and then she begged me so piteously to allow

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her to be, as she termed it, 'herself' while here, at Gaynesford. You cannot know, as I know, how eagerly 'they' always long to be loved for themselves."

"And what do you think can be done now?" He turned and faced her, remembering what the Comte d'Albret had said of the Baroness Karff. The whole world had altered in the last few minutes. He tried to think of Sabine, only of Sabine, but her image was blurred; another, surrounded with the symbols of a rank to which he could not aspire, had taken the place of the woman he loved, and who had clung to him,—for the moment he could only think of himself and of the pitiable figure he cut in his own estimation. "I am not of the stuff," he said harshly, "of which Ruritanian heroes of romance are made."

"Ruritanian? I don't know what you mean," said the Baroness, in a puzzled tone, for she had never heard of that most delectable of modern kingdoms.

"I have always thought," he went on ungraciously, "that the position which I presume you have planned for me to fill is one of the most unpleasant which can fall to the lot of man——"

"But you are mistaken!" she cried quickly,—at last he had given her an opening,—"quite mistaken! I have made no plan—there is no plan possible as yet. What I have come to propose to you is something very different,—very, very superior, if I may say so, to a morganatic marriage."

"Eh, what?"—she had again succeeded in surprising him.

Domville left the window; he once more came close to the woman whom he knew,—the knowledge was humiliating, — to be so nearly connected with himself. He sat down and put his elbows on what had been his mother's writing-table, and, with his chin resting on his left hand, he listened in complete silence

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to what the Baroness Karff was pleased to term her proposal, which was evidently the only way she was ready to admit as possible out of the difficult, nay intolerable, position in which her lack of candour had placed him.

At first she spoke with a certain hesitation,—then, as the man sitting opposite to her made no comment and uttered no exclamation, she grew more confident, more frank in the exposition of her plan.

When at last she stopped speaking, she fully expected Domville to make an eager, if, saving his masculine pride, a rather shamefaced, assent. But she did not know this man, her nephew in blood. . . . Further, the atmosphere in which the Baroness Karff had now lived for over twenty years acts on average human nature just as extreme heat acts on an iron bar, that is it twists and deviates it into monstrous shapes. In that atmosphere men and women live a life so far removed from the ordinary that actions which would seem impossible in everyday life become normal and even praiseworthy in that world of the fifth dimension.

"Let me understand clearly what it is you propose," he said in a calm, level tone. "For reasons into which you refuse to enter, but which you say will ere long be made quite clear to me, you do not think it advisable that your charge should make what would be, after all, only a morganatic marriage with an Englishman of small fortune and no particular rank?"

"The Domvilles are as good as anybody!" exclaimed the Baroness Karff sharply, — she suddenly became aware that she was to have some trouble with him.

"No matter," he said harshly, "you and I may think all the world of the Domvilles,—we do, of course! But I am regarding the matter from the point of view of the other people. After all, the lady of whom we are speaking is not an Englishwoman, or even an English princess."

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"That's true," said the Baroness Karff; "I see that you understand the difficult situation in which we are placed, and I am very glad of it."

"Before expressing your satisfaction, please hear me out," said Domville in a low voice. "An ordinary morganatic marriage being therefore out of the question,—the more so that it presents, as you have very clearly put before me, many most disagreeable and humiliating features to the ordinary man who embarks on such a tie with a lady of royal rank,—you suggest that there should take place between your mistress and myself a secret marriage, unsuspected and unknown, at any rate for a time, to anyone excepting the three or four people whom we should be compelled to take into our secret, you yourself being our principal confidant. I cannot help suspecting, my dear aunt,"—the Baroness stirred uneasily in her chair,—"that, morality apart, you would think it better for the happiness of the young lady to whom you feel such devotion, that there should be no religious ceremony. You regard love as a species of infectious disease,—a kind of sentimental measles,—and no doubt there's something to be said for your point of view. But you feel very truly that this alternative would not suit the Countess Sabine,—let me go on calling her by that name,—or even myself. There is therefore to be a ceremony, just to satisfy our scrupulous consciences, and then—there is to begin a lifelong game of hide and seek. The husband and wife, canonically but not legally married, will meet where and when they can. Once a year, so much is promised, they will enjoy a honeymoon here, at Gaynesford. Of course the truth, or something of the truth, will leak out, but officially I am to remain a bachelor, while my wife remains a beautiful, and an apparently maiden, princess at the Austrian, or is it at the Russian, Court?"

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"No," said the Baroness uneasily. "The — the Princess has her own establishment."

"Ah, she has her own establishment? Well, no matter! Have I made any mistake as to the exact terms of the extraordinary proposal you have apparently come down from London to put before me?"

"No," said the Baroness abruptly, "you have put the case fairly,—and what would not many a man I have known give to be in your shoes!"

"And yet, tempting though the proposal is," cried Domville, jumping to his feet, "I reject it! Those shoes would not fit me—so much I can tell you at once! I still feel bewildered by the amazing confidences you have made me in the last half hour. And just now I was again more foolish,—again more blind,—than mortal man has any business to be! I was actually debating as to whether I could bring my proud stomach to accept that other position which we both agree to be fraught with constant humiliation. But—but apparently even that position is not open to me!"

His words had come out in broken sequence; his thoughts were all in piteous disarray,—only pride and self-respect remained fiercely insistent of their claim on his heart and conscience.

"And that," said the Baroness Karff very quietly, "is your last word? Well, perhaps it's the best solution, after all. I daresay I've been a fool, too, but I've always tried to give her everything she wanted, and just now she wants—you."

"May I see her?" said Domville hoarsely. He imprudently added, "I can't believe that she's authorized this—this outrageous proposal. Does she even know of it, I wonder?"

"She knows," answered the Baroness, exasperated, "quite as much as it is right that she should know! You put your pride before her happiness. That's the

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fact, however much you may wrap up your meaning in fine words. If I understand you rightly, you consider that my mistress ought to give up everything, become plain Mrs. Domville, and live her life out here?"—and the speaker looked with considerable contempt round the beautiful room in which they were holding their singular conversation.

"I think nothing of the kind!" cried Domville violently. "All I say is that the plan which you propose, and which I cannot believe you have her authority for proposing, is from my point of view hateful and humiliating to us both. It might suit some men, it might even work very well with some men,—but you have made a mistake in thinking that I should be a fit subject for such an experiment."

"You have not yet had time to tell yourself," she said with a slight smile, "that what you refuse, some other man will eagerly accept. Why, not so very long ago she was fancying herself in love with that fat little fellow whom you saw,—who came after her here."

Then the Baroness Karff was suddenly made aware that she had gone further than she had meant to go with Francis Domville. Her stout heart, which had never quailed before the great ones of the earth, now filled with very real fear. She told herself that the man standing before her looked dangerous, and as he made a step forward she shrank back instinctively.

"Listen!" he said imperiously, "having told me so much, you must tell me more. She declared she had never been with that man save in your actual presence. Is that a lie? She said that he was abhorrent to her,—that he was persecuting her,—that he had no shadow of claim on her, that—that they had never been lovers. Is all that untrue?"

"No, no," she answered hurriedly. "All that is true. I was wrong to say what I did. I only meant——"

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"—What did you mean?" asked Domville, and his blazing eyes still held her.

"Before she ever saw Don Diego——"

"Don Diego?" repeated Domville incredulously,—then with blinding clearness the whole truth, the use to which he had been put by the woman sitting there before him, burst upon his mind.

"Yes," said the Baroness rather quickly. "What was I saying?—well, before she ever saw him, she had made an ideal of him, she was in a sense 'in love' with him."

But Domville was staring at her with a very strange expression in his eyes. "Then that was Don Diego?" He added, "that explains everything——"

"Perhaps it does," admitted the Baroness. She had the grace to hang her head before the look of despair and condemnation which he turned on her.

"I am beginning to see," he said, "the part I played in your plot."

"You're quite mistaken, Mr. Domville! There was no plot. When I took this house I hardly knew of your existence. You being here—well, of course I ran a certain risk."

"You acknowledge that?" he looked at her curiously. God! what a fool he had been!

"But the marriage is on the point of being annulled at Rome—Don Diego has no case," she declared confidently.

"I hope with all my heart for *her* sake that you are right," he said, gravely. "That's of far more real consequence to the Margravine of Moravia than anything which may have happened while she was playing the part of ingénue in the Baroness Karff's English comedy."

She gave him a quick, furtive look: "Do you mean that you were not as—as——"

"Sincere?" he suggested—

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"—As much in love as you seemed to be," she corrected, brutally.

Domville's heart grew bitter within him. "As to the exact measure of sincerity with which my part in your comedy was played out——" he cried, and then he stopped speaking, the flood of bitterness rising, threatening to submerge him,—"that is of little consequence. The point, I take it, is this,—you wished to cure your mistress. Well, as you said to me not long ago, Gaynesford has worked wonders,—she is now more lovely, more blooming than ever. But perhaps it's best not to inquire too curiously into what has wrought the cure. As to love,—well, despite your words concerning Don Diego, I venture to think she has known nothing of love?"

"Nothing before she met you,—she never had the opportunity," said the Baroness naively. The turn the conversation had taken at once puzzled and relieved her.

"Exactly,—for Don Diego did not fill the bill!" observed Domville. He desired to desecrate Sabine's image to himself, but even as he spoke he knew that his cruel words were not uttered of the woman he loved, and who, he knew, loved him, but of the lifeless crowned and sceptred figure who had taken her place.

"You use very odd expressions!" The Baroness was displeased.

"Do I?" he said: "well, if you prefer it put in another way, we must admit, you and I, that your plan, we will not call it a plot, succeeded admirably. No harm has been done——"

"Of course I knew you were quite to be trusted," she interjected.

He looked down at her, and—again the Baroness Karff felt rather afraid of Francis Domville. "Oh, yes," he said drily, "my intentions, I assure you, were strictly honourable. No harm, I repeat, has been done."

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"And then you have seen so little of one another," she said, nervously. "Why, we haven't been a month here yet."

"Very true. What's a month out of the life of a man as old as I, or of a woman as young as she? Why, nothing!" cried Domville. "'Twill have served perhaps to inoculate her against any other danger of this kind, though I cannot believe she's as susceptible as you make her out to be——"

But the Baroness was not listening to Domville. She was asking herself, and that very uneasily, what she should say to Sabine,—how she should dress up the plain fact that they had both been mistaken in their estimate of his feelings. Suddenly, for she was not a woman given to indecision, she told herself that her way was plain. She would convey something of Domville's natural dismay on hearing not only who was hidden under the name of Sabine Reiffersberg, but also of the very grave further complications caused by what the Baroness in her own mind always referred to as the Don Diego affair. As regarded this matter, the Margravine's own conscience had never been at ease; she would accept without question the decision, which she should be told was Domville's, that till the successful issue of her appeal to Rome no further question should be raised, no further meetings should take place between them.

As to the future—the Baroness Karff knew by long experience that, if the present can be successfully dealt with, the future has a surprising way of taking care of itself.

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CHAPTER XXIII

"Ne pleure pas, toi que j'aimais :
Ce qui n'est plus, ne fut jamais."

"Laisse couler ma douleur sombre :
Une ombre peut pleurer une ombre."

EVEN after a physical blow which is ultimately to result in death, many a man has gone about apparently unharmed till that inner self which keeps him standing has been worsted in the struggle between his physical and his spiritual being. And what is true of a physical blow is in some ways even truer of one which has found the vulnerable joint in the mental armour.

On leaving the Baroness Karff, on finding himself free of what had become to him a hateful presence, the agony of mind, the deep wrath and keen mortification which had possessed Domville during the interview he had just gone through, seemed to drop off him like a cloak. In a few moments his immediate past, those thirty-odd days which he had thought would transform the whole of his future life, had come to appear as unreal to him as an already vanished mirage; while the central figure of the dream from which he had been so sadly awakened had also become strangely faded and blurred.

His mind, caught up once more in the whirl of a work-a-day world, seemed agreeably clear and lucid, and drove his will with extraordinary swiftness. As he made his way quickly through the rooms which compose the

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left wing of the manor-house to the last one of all, that is to the estate room, he decided on what should be his immediate course. He told himself that he would stay where he was till the Baroness were well away; that then he would see Blake, and give the old man the instructions and messages which would obviate his going back to the presbytery. Even in the abnormal state in which he found himself, Domville was vaguely aware that he would do well to avoid meeting the priest's sympathetic glance, and Mitroff's half-mocking, wholly curious flashes of inquiry.

Then he sat down, and, scarcely aware of what he was doing, began tearing off the wrappers from a heap of circulars which had accumulated during the last month, and which he had judged to be of no account. While engaged in this futile labour, he heard sounds indicating the final departure of the Baroness Karff from Gaynesford Manor, and, for the first time since he had left her presence, he felt thrilled with anger, and an impotent desire for revenge on the woman who had so used him to her own ends.

He rose and walked twice up and down the room, telling himself that his interview with Blake could wait —wait, that is, till he had succeeded in returning to the reasonable, equable frame of mind in which he had been only a few moments ago. Then he set himself a test— he would go through those rooms each of which had held for him till this morning some poignantly intimate association with the woman whom he had so fully believed would be his wife; he would remind himself, in these places where everything must speak of her, of how unreal, how damnably false, had been their apparent oneness.

To his own secret surprise, but also to his own infinite relief, Domville bore the ordeal he had set himself wonderfully well. When he was passing through the

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great hall where his second meeting with Sabine had taken place, and where, as he now reminded himself, the comedy arranged by the Baroness Karff had really begun, it was not Sabine's shape which rose before him, but that of the man whom he now knew to have been the Portuguese pretender, Don Diego. The memory of their interview brought with it a feeling of sudden rage,—but for this Domville rebuked himself harshly; if the Margravine of Moravia were indeed what he now believed her to be, why should he feel animosity against the man whom she had doubtless treated as badly as she had treated him, Domville, himself?

Leaving the hall, he stood for a moment at the foot of the staircase leading up to the long gallery and so to the chapel; and then, though he was scarcely conscious that it was so, his mood took a softer turn. Sabine's piety had been as unquestioning, as artless, as had been that of those successive generations of Catholic women born and bred at Gaynesford during penal times. As we have seen, it had been a sorry day to Francis Domville and his father when the sanctuary light had been extinguished at Gaynesford for the first time for close on four hundred years. That the chapel should be reconstituted, the altar light re-lit, with the coming of Sabine, had curiously impressed his imagination, and the half-hour spent in the chapel at the beginning of each day had, in a sense, sanctified his strange wooing of the woman he had so early decided should succeed those gentle ghosts, and restore the simple pious atmosphere which had now so long been lacking to the beloved old house.

As he hesitated whether he should include the chapel in this bitter pilgrimage, there came to Domville the recollection of the now distant morning when he and Sabine had come down those broad, shining oak steps together, he grasping her hand for

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fear that she should slip. It was his only memory connected with her stay at Gaynesford wholly unspoilt and untarnished by the Baroness Karff. That short progress down the staircase had been the beginning of the one blissful hour when they had been really alone together, and now he blamed himself for having made so little use of it. Had he then pressed her, he thought —nay, he felt sure, looking back, that she would have told him the truth.

But this softer mood was only transitory, for as he turned into the hall Domville was again possessed by the mocking presence of Don Diego, and so powerful, so hateful was this possession, that he passed quickly through the open door giving on to the terrace, and turned into the little path which led to the walled garden lying hidden to the right of the house.

He opened the green door and stood for a moment within the arch through which the Baroness and her supposed ward had so often preceded him; before him stretched the path at the other end of which was the summer-house, and a deep calm brooded over the now deserted garden. Only three days had gone by since Domville had last been here with Sabine, but now he told himself that these three days had brought about a singular change, or else that he had been blind to much that he now saw only too clearly. All through his nomadic youth, Domville had kept secret and sacred a happy vision of his Surrey home as of a place where the grass was greener, where the flowers bloomed more fragrantly, where even God's sky was bluer than in other English gardens. But now he saw that this had been yet another delusion. He told himself with a touch of sharp annoyance that the gardens before him wore a neglected, untended air; he noticed that the apple-tree which formed the very centre of a small orchard-like enclosure to his left was stripped of leaves,

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and if not dead then dying. Autumn, during these three long days, had stolen a march on summer, and crept through the Gaynesford garden, laying, as she passed by, her searing finger on every leaf and blossom. The flowers bordering the path which had formed, so many times, the most ideal of frames for Sabine's girlish beauty, were now wilted; the grass on which was set the sundial of which the motto contained so singular and apt a warning for them both, had lost its delicate freshness.

And then, as he stood there, Fate sent Domville a victim in the person of the old gardener. "Donaldson," he said sharply, "I'm not satisfied with the way the gardens are being kept. Next time I'm here, I mean before letting the place again, I shall have to discuss the matter with you. And, Donaldson,—you remember all that was planned for the old rose-garden?"

"Ay, I remember, but nothing can be done till November, sir."

"There will be nothing to do,—in November or at any other time. I have changed my mind; the rose-garden can remain as it is,—or stay, seeing the state it's in, I should prefer to see it turfed over. The place was badly chosen."

At last, feeling sick at heart, Domville went back into the house and wrote a short note to Father Copley, explaining that business called him once more to town immediately. In another to Mitroff he explained, in language that was almost exaggeratedly cordial and courteous, that the Russian would have to make his way back to London alone, for he, Domville, was likely to be too much occupied with his cousin, Paul Feyghine's affairs to be able to return for some considerable time to Gaynesford. He was determined to conceal from both the priest and Mitroff the humiliating misfortune which had befallen him. Then at last he rang for Blake, and

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with the sight of the old man Domville remembered with a certain shock the Baroness Karff's revelation of her identity.

"Blake, I wish to ask you a question," he said gravely. "I suppose that in the village everyone knew of the Baroness Karff's former connection with this place? You were all aware, I presume, that she was no stranger to Gaynesford."

A curious look,—half-cunning, half-childish,—indicating the possession of a sixth sense, of a penetrating instinct, in the otherwise dull-witted,—came over the old servant's face, as he met, not very willingly, Domville's glance of stern inquiry.

"Well, sir, we soon had a sort of an idea—— And then, sir, you see there was the name to guide us."

"What name?" asked Domville, quickly. "I thought the name of my grandfather's second wife was Brown. Surely she was known as Mrs. Brown when she lived in the White House?"

"Yes, sir, but that was not her real name—not her father's name, sir."

"Then what was her name?" asked Domville, impatiently. "I must have known it once, but if so it's quite slipped my memory,"

"Why, Calf was the name,"—Blake allowed himself a deprecating smile,—"there's still one or two alive that can remember farmer Calf, he that had the Nower Farm."

"Would you, Blake, have known this lady again?" asked Domville.

"Well, she's not so much changed as you'd think, sir; just grown a bit older, as we all have,—but she's the same inquisitive manner. She hadn't been here two days before she came down to see me and my wife. She says to Mrs. Blake, sir, 'I know Gaynesford; I used to stay here when I was a young girl;' and my wife, sir, just looked at her and said: 'I don't doubt

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you did, Ma'am.' She didn't come no more. I knew her too, after I'd cast my mind back a bit. Why, she's the very spit of Miss Letty, only that Miss Letty was a rare beauty, and haughty in the proper manner. But it's a very old story now, sir, begun long before you was born—so it's perhaps all best forgotten!"

"Yes," said Domville, shortly, "I agree, Blake, absolutely. Such things are best forgotten, and it's a pity when one's reminded of them."

On his return to London, Domville made a gallant effort to take up the thread of his life exactly as if the weeks spent by him at Gaynesford had never been. The Baroness Karff and her mistress disappeared out of his existence as suddenly as they had made their irruption into it. There came moments when the image of Sabine would suddenly become imploringly insistent, but then he was able to make use of what ever proved a most effective caustic,—he had but to recall the insulting terms in which the Baroness Karff had couched her amazing offer in order to arouse once more in himself a deep wrath and keen mortification which could be trusted to obliterate any softer and tenderer memory.

An extraneous, unlooked-for circumstance also came to Domville's aid. The letter he had written to Mitroff concerning his cousin Paul Feyghine's affairs turned out to have oddly previsioned the truth. Almost immediately on his return to London, Domville found himself closely involved in what soon became a bitter quarrel between Madame Feyghine and her only son. Paul had received an unofficial recall from the colonel of his former regiment, an old friend of his father and of the Grand Duke Paul, and this summons, which Feyghine was determined for the present to disregard, he attributed, not to the imminence of the coming

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struggle between Japan and Russia, which was even then beginning to make very uneasy the chancelleries of Europe, but to the direct intervention of his mother.

Madame Feyghine, over-estimating the influence of Domville over his cousin, had drawn him into the discussion. For the first time Domville broke through the wise rule he had early made of never discussing Paul's affairs with Paul's mother; and, as an immediate result, his relations with his cousin became less cordial and also less intimate than they had ever been. Neither could see, or admit, the other's point of view. Domville felt convinced that his aunt was not now actuated, as her son believed her to be, by a desire to cut the bond which linked him to Joaquina Nuñez. No doubt she wished that this should happen, but he thought it quite clear that she was honestly alarmed lest Paul should fall into serious disgrace at the Russian Court. Madame Feyghine at last proved that her nephew was probably right by herself suggesting a solution which happened to be particularly agreeable to Domville. Her proposal was that the two cousins should together pay a flying visit to St. Petersburg, that there Paul should report himself, and then, under pretext of urgent private business, return to London.

When Feyghine abruptly declined to carry out his mother's plan, Domville felt the more vexed because the journey had promised him a measure of forgetfulness of all that sometimes became so intolerably present to him,—of memories only kept at bay by a mixture of anger and pride which he found it not always easy to keep at burning-point.

At the end of a discussion concerning Paul and his affairs which he secretly decided should be the last he would hold with his aunt, Domville made up his mind to question Madame Feyghine concerning the early life of the Baroness Karff. Rather to his surprise,

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he found her quite willing to be communicative about what he knew had been to her and to his own father a very painful matter. But the time had come when Letty Feyghine could afford to be generous concerning her half-sister.

"I have often wondered," she observed, "whether you really knew all about that odd business; but of course old Plumbe must have told you. I know he did his best to check your poor father's ridiculous generosity; and it was owing to my suggestion that they insisted, as a condition of the very handsome sum settled on her, that she should keep to her mother's name, for I need hardly tell you that she had not the slightest legal right to *ours*. Still, I'm bound to admit," she added, half smiling, "that she's made the name we forced her to keep illustrious. My half-sister's a mighty clever woman, Francis! We've never kept up with her, but I occasionally have news of how she's going on from people who of course know nothing of our relationship."

"You got her some post abroad?" observed Domville.

"Yes," answered Madame Feyghine complacently, "and I did a very good action when I obtained for her the position of dame de compagnie to the poor Archduchess Renier. I'm told that it was thanks to the Baroness Karff, as she has now become, that her orphan princess was finally chosen to be Margravine of Moravia! She now runs, it seems, not only the funny little kingdom, but also the Margravine herself! What's more, the Baroness holds her own very well with all the great people who would like to turn the princess into an obedient cipher!"

"And does the Baroness Karff ever come to England?"

Domville wished to ascertain whether Madame Feyghine knew anything of all that had just taken place;

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but there was no mistaking the sincerity with which she at once answered his question. "No, never. She hardly lets the Margravine out of her sight: at courts more than anywhere else 'les absents ont toujours tort.' By the way, she's allowed her Margravine to get herself into a very bad matrimonial tangle—you must have seen all about it, Francis, for the papers at one moment were full of it, and no one knows what the end of it will be! The Grand Duke Paul evidently thought the worthy Baroness had for once gone too far,—too far, I mean, in trying to get the Margravine's marriage annulled. Yet I fancy she'll succeed, for your Church, my dear Francis, has la manche très large where royal personages are concerned! If the Margravine were Orthodox, she would find it a *very* different matter."

Domville jumped up. He had learnt all his aunt could tell him, and had no wish to enter into a theological discussion with Madame Feyghine, who, together with her Russian husband's faith, had assumed the unreasoning Russian prejudice against her own father's religion.

The next day Domville left London. He told himself that absence, the linking up with old friends, and the making of new acquaintances, would prove a certain cure for a condition of mind, part mental part physical, which he knew was only kept at bay by various devices which might any day fail him.

But his hosts found him a sorry guest, and the day came when he felt that he would be better, infinitely better, alone, and so he hurried back to the rooms which he shared with Feyghine, who remained, in spite of their late dissension, the only human being with whom he felt sufficiently intimate to be himself. With Paul he was secure from either indiscreet sympathy or questioning; indeed, he flattered himself that Feyghine

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was too much absorbed in his own affairs to notice any change, any untoward restlessness in him.

And then began for Domville a phase to which he was to look back with something at once akin to amazement and shame. The woman whom he desired only to remember as a charming phantom, created by his own too ardent imagination, once more became his one exclusive haunting thought. He dreamt of her asleep and waking; even when walking through the quiet streets of London in late summer, he saw Sabine in every graceful form that passed him by. He lived again through every moment,—dwelt on each incident which had made up the sum of his gossamer wooing,—remembered with agonized intensity their one moment of intimate communion.

He now drew a sharp distinction between Sabine and Sabine's ambassador; and he was tormented by a suspicion that during his interview with the Baroness Karff he had made a grave mistake,—shown his amazement, his just anger, his revolt, far too plainly. Had he refused to listen to that evil woman,—had he insisted on his right to an interview with Sabine, some middle course compatible, if not with his personal dignity then with his honour, might have been devised.

At last, some few weeks after he had left Gaynesford, there came a day when Domville learnt that the decision of the Curia had been given in favour of the Margravine of Moravia. The Baroness had triumphed, and her mistress was once more free. But the triumph was short-lived. Almost at once an indifferent world learnt that Moravia was again to become an integral part of the Austrian Empire. The young Princess who had been chosen to make of the ancient Margraviate a separate kingdom, though personally popular, was believed to be ruled by a favourite lady-in-waiting who was not so popular, and her Highness' quondam sub-

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jects were therefore the more ready to acquiesce in her abdication. Indeed, the only aspect of the case which puzzled the world at large was the apparent alacrity with which her Highness herself consented to abdicate.

The news filled Domville with a curious feeling of mingled relief and jealousy, and though he at once told himself that the fact which meant so much to her could not and should not in any way affect him, the days that followed contained for him hours of such hope and fear,—of such suspense and longing,—that those about him, the little circle composed of his cousin, his aunt, his sister, and Mary Wratten, realized that something was indeed very wrong with him, and each became, according to his or her inner nature, uneasy, suspicious, distressed, or watchful.

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CHAPTER XXIV

J'achève quelquefois une chaumière à la lueur d'une de mes maisons qui brule.

LONELINESS and physical depression are seldom good counsellors; together they drove Francis Domville to South Street one early September afternoon.

By most of her acquaintances Madame Feyghine was supposed to be abroad, patronizing one of the foreign spas where she almost invariably spent the late summer weeks of each year; but Domville knew well that his aunt was staying on in town grimly resolved to force her son to go back to St. Petersburg. The persistent rumours of the coming war between Russia and Japan gave her a good excuse, and one of which she made the utmost. Twice since Domville had returned to London, his aunt had sent for him in order to enlist him on her side in the struggle which was now going on between herself and Paul.

He knew that by going to South Street to-day he would again expose himself to a tiresome, disagreeable discussion concerning the probability of a conflict in the Far East, which to those intimates whom Madame Feyghine trusted would seem to have been provoked on the part of Providence with the special object of detaching Paul Feyghine from his connection with the dancer Joaquina. But, even so, Domville felt that a discussion with his aunt would to-day be preferable to walking

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about in the company of his own thoughts, or to spending the afternoon in his still deserted club. He avoided his sister, he even avoided, as far as was possible, Paul Feyghine. In his present mood, the thought of seeing his aunt was tolerable because he was sure of finding her absorbed in her own affairs, with no time to waste on his.

Yet it was with a feeling of relief that he heard from old Gregor that Madame Feyghine was away,—that she had driven out to Richmond for the day in answer to a request from an old friend and contemporary who lay ill there. Domville asked if Miss Wratten were in, and, with the first sensation of pleasure he had felt for many days, he was shown up into the cool, light back drawing-room, where Mary Wratten spent so many hours performing the often futile tasks set her by the old woman with whom she was in such slight sympathy.

As Francis Domville came in, she greeted him with a warmth, an evident sincerity, that touched him. He told himself that one of the most agreeable traits in Mary's character was a certain evenness of disposition, which made it possible to do with her what is often difficult with a woman,—that is, to take up again without apology or explanation the thread of a friendship which has been, if not broken off, then for a time suspended.

Their intimacy, which was very real, had never been of the epistolary kind; any interchange of letters between her nephew and her companion would have greatly shocked and surprised Madame Feyghine,—a fact of which Miss Wratten was far more vividly aware than was Domville himself. Of late they had seen exceptionally little of one another, for, since his return from Gaynesford, Domville, as we have seen, had avoided his sister's house, and it was there that he and Mary Wratten, in the old days, had formed their rather peculiar intimacy. How much she had missed Francis Domville out of her dull, toneless life, Miss Wratten told no one,

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not even herself, but the sight of him had given her a sudden thrill of pleasure.

Domville saw that she was engaged in adding the letters P. P. C. to a large heap of Madame Feyghine's black-bordered visiting cards, and, for a little while after he had sat down, she continued her task. "There!" she said at last, sorting with quick, deft fingers the small squares of pasteboard into packets; "I shall be very much surprised if Madame Feyghine ever uses these cards!"

"Then you don't believe my aunt is going to Russia after all?" exclaimed Domville.

"Our going," said Mary Wratten, "is entirely dependent on her son; and I am convinced that Paul doesn't mean to go,—unless, of course, war between Russia and Japan is actually declared, and in that case I'm sure he would be more eager to join his regiment again than Madame Feyghine herself would be to see him do so. But you must know his intentions even better than I do," she added quickly.

Domville remained silent; for one thing, the subject of Paul Feyghine was a difficult one to discuss with a woman who knew at once so much and so little of the mother's and son's private affairs as did Miss Wratten; and then he was himself in that state of mind in which a man finds it impossible to make small talk, and she was too sensitively aware of his mood to render him the assistance which a woman who was more indifferent would have done.

After a silence that seemed long and oppressive, at last he got up and held out his hand to say good-bye; then the involuntary shadow on Mary's face gave him a moment of compunction. He bethought himself how dull, and mentally airless, the life of this clever and intelligent young woman must be; and so, partly guided perhaps by an obscure distaste for his own company and

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his own unhappy thoughts, he exclaimed, "It is a pity to sit indoors on such a day as this! Let's go for a walk round the Park and then down to Sanctuary House." He had the satisfaction of seeing her face brighten at the suggestion.

A few moments later they left South Street and turned into Hyde Park; and there then began what remained in Mary Wratten's memory as perhaps the most singular and bitter-sweet hour of her life; for, during the considerable time it took those two people to make the round,—familiar to so many Londoners who walk for health rather than for pleasure,—Domville, striding along as if time was of great moment to them both, said no single word to his companion.

True, there was but little to recall the walled gardens of Gaynesford in the prim parterres of Hyde Park; but this was the first time Domville had been in the open air in the company of a woman since he and Sabine had parted, and the memory of her grew poignant, and filled him with an agony of jealous grief and longing which made him incapable of speech.

More than once he opened his lips, and then closed them again.

At last, still in silence, they reached Hyde Park Corner and crossed over to the Green Park; and there, for the first time, Domville so far forgot himself as to remember that perhaps Mary Wratten might be tired. Looking up, he saw that two chairs had been moved from one of the paths and placed close together under a large tree,—"Shall we sit down?" he said abruptly, and his voice sounded strangely to himself.

The warm autumn afternoon had brought out a great crowd of human beings; men, women, and children lay and sat, dotting the grass within a few feet of where they had placed themselves, but they both felt singularly alone.

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A sensation of moved gratitude to the woman sitting by his side gradually began to take possession of Francis Domville's sore heart. However close and kindly their friendship, he felt that during the last hour he had subjected her to a trying ordeal,—one to which a man has scarcely a right to subject a woman unless he intends the link between them to become far closer than Domville had thought of in connection with Mary Wratten.

During that memory-laden hour, he had felt her physical nearness a comfortable thing, and, with unconscious egoism, he asked himself whether here might not be a solution of his present intolerable state. Careless of the rather strange figure he presented, he leant forward, his two hands clasped over his stick, thinking deeply. Were he married to Mary Wratten, the brief episode which now dwelt with him so unceasingly would surely fall into due perspective. He would forget,—it would become with him a matter of honour to forget,—those days of unreal rapture, every moment of which he now lived over and over again, and from which there had come an awakening fraught with such humiliation and anger.

He remembered how attractive he had thought Mary Wratten at Sanctuary House, on the night of the fête. What a fool he had been that night,—to what a pass his mad craving for romance had brought him!

He meant to sell Gaynesford; the place of which he had always been so proud had become hateful to him. With what remained after all the charges on the estate were paid off, there would be amply enough to provide such a life—the life of two well-matched comrades—as he and Mary would lead. It was significant of his state of mind that he thought of Mary as middle-aged,—of himself as a man who has outlived everything that makes life worth living.

Still silent, he turned slightly round and glanced at

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the girl sitting by his side,—and, without a quiver of his eyelid, without even appearing to be looking at her with any special meaning, his eyes rested approvingly on the rather fastidiously neat figure. He noted the delicate, if not very regular, profile, partly hidden by the boat-shaped hat,—allowed himself to admire the light brown hair, Miss Wratten's principal beauty, which was braided in a way that had become much out of date, and therefore, in its way, distinguished.

"Mary," he said suddenly,—and as he uttered her name she turned to him quickly,—"I want to ask you a question. Did you despise me during that Rose Hassal affair?"——

His words surprised her; she had not thought of Francis Domville in connection with Rose Hassal for a long time. "No," she said at last, "I did not despise you at all. But I was not, perhaps, as sorry as some of your friends seem to have been that it all came to nothing. I know many people make those marriages nowadays, and even get on very well,—but somehow I never thought that you would have been really happy together."

"But still," he said, rather awkwardly, "you surely do not believe, what so many women apparently believe, that no marriage can be happy unless it begins—unless it is the outcome——" he waited, seeking a phrase which would express his meaning without offence.

"—You mean," she suggested, "unless it begins with a violent love affair as preliminary?"

"Something of the sort," he stammered. "Of course that is the old ideal—the boy and girl ideal——"

"I do believe in one other foundation for a happy marriage," said Mary Wratten deliberately, "it is that described in a passage in the—I mean in *my*—prayer-book."

"I don't know the passage," said Domville rather

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sharply; it disturbed him that she should remind him at this moment of their difference of religion.

"You must have heard it," she said lightly, but her voice faltered a little, "dozens of times,—I mean the passage in the marriage service which says that matrimony may be entered into, 'for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.'"

"And do you think," went on Domville, quite unconscious of the doubting note in his own voice, "that a marriage founded on the phrases you have just quoted to me, would be likely to bring happiness to two such people,—to such a man and such a woman,—as we, you and I, Mary, are ourselves?"

"Only possible," she said,—and she spoke with a curious lack of either emotion or strain in her even voice,—"when the two people are each what I should call heart-whole. I don't think, for instance, that such a marriage would prove either a remedy or a success, were either the man or the woman in love with someone else."

"If that were true," he answered with sudden bitterness, "then half the people who are now apparently happily married would have remained single."

"But surely, at the time when they are thinking of the sort of marriage of reason we are discussing,"—and Mary could not help a touch of pain coming into her voice, though Domville was quite unconscious of it,—"the contracting parties are not actually in love with someone else? Each may have been so in the past, but the feeling has died down,—has disappeared."

"I think you are mistaken," said Domville harshly, "at any rate as regards the man; I cannot pretend to understand women,"—and in his voice the bitterness was quite undisguised. "A man is very often caught,—of course I don't mean in any unpleasant sense,—at the

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rebound; hence the old adage, which has a good deal of truth in it after all."

"Oh, yes," she said, "I know that often happens, especially with very young men; they fancy themselves in love,—they are perhaps in love,—the lady says 'No,' and then they console themselves with extraordinary quickness. But I was thinking of such a case as that you suggested,—that in which both the man and woman would be," she smiled at him rather sadly, "fully 'grown up.' After all,"—there was a certain appeal in her voice,—"I'm bound to tell you what I really think?"

"Certainly," he said quickly; he was so completely absorbed in himself, and his longing for anything which should bring him peace, and a return of self-esteem, that he had hardly noted her last words. "But I'm not talking in this case of what people call love, but rather of the feelings, the—the point of view so well expressed in the Protestant marriage service. Not so very long ago I had certainly persuaded myself that I was in love, or in a very good imitation of love, with Rose Hassal!"

Domville spoke lightly, he tried to smile, but Mary, looking at his ravaged face, turned quickly away. She asked herself, rather piteously, why he should go to the trouble of lying,—and lying to her. Till to-day she had thought it possible, though not very likely, that Domville's look of strain and misery might be due to illness, —to the sleeplessness of which he had openly complained to his aunt; but now she knew better.

"Listen, Francis," she said, "I should like to tell you something which perhaps bears on our discussion."

Then she looked straight in front of her, and, though she was not conscious then of the curious irregular line of buildings which bounds the Green Park on the east side, yet ever afterwards, when remembering what had then taken place, she always saw rising before her that stately vista of unspoilt eighteenth-century London.

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"Not long ago," she began, "I heard a story,—perhaps I should say a piece of gossip,—which made a very painful impression on my mind. I was told of a woman who, most miserably married, had the power of attracting, as that sort of women so often have, a great deal of,—well, shall we say respectful and hopeless love and devotion? One of her platonic lovers—the only one whose affection moved her—had, like the man in the Bible, great possessions, and his parents were naturally exceedingly anxious that he should marry and settle down. He held out for a long time—for several years—but at last he came across a very young girl, she was hardly more than a child, whose simplicity pleased him, and he married her. Three months later the husband of the woman he had cared for so long was killed in an accident. Now the thought of these two, no, of these three, people, has haunted me,—and especially do I pity the man and his young wife."

For a few moments Domville made no comment; then he turned to her with a certain excitement in his manner: "I won't pretend to misunderstand you!" he exclaimed. "But I want you to believe that your story holds no moral for me. My case, and the case of the man,—I know whom you mean,—are not in any way similar. I've been a fool; I see that you have guessed that much. I made a mistake of which some of the effects are likely to remain with me as long as I live." Again, and more violently, he exclaimed, "I was a fool! an unutterable fool! No one knows anything about it, not even Paul Feyghine,—but I will tell you something of it, Mary, and then you will understand."

"Why tell me now?" she said hurriedly; "you may be sorry afterwards that you said anything about it."

"I should like to tell you," he repeated, "that is, if you don't mind listening;"—and then in broken, confused language he told her what had happened at

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Gaynesford, suppressing all names, and only indicating very vaguely the unattainable rank of the woman he loved. He made, however, quite clear the curious matrimonial skein in which Sabine had then found herself entangled.

"Now that she is free," said Mary Wratten at last,—she had made no comment and had asked no question while he had been speaking,—"I am sure that she will come back to you!"

He shook his head. "No," he said, "she might if she were alone, but she is not alone. And then, for reasons which I have indicated to you, I could not meet her as I might an ordinary woman, half way. No, no! It's all over as far as I'm concerned. I'm not fool enough not to know that——"

"—But you have not seen her," said Mary. "Surely in fairness to her you ought to wait."

"Wait? Wait for what? No, Mary, that's bad advice. I want to put it out of my own power to do what I am sure I should live to regret—to feel shame for having done. You don't know how I've been tempted—tempted to go and find that woman, my father's half-sister,—to tell her that I'm ready to consent to anything, however shameful, if only——" he stopped abruptly.

"—Oh, no," she said quickly, "you must not do that."

"Then I must put it out of my own power to do it," he said grimly.

Her heart,—not her lips,—gave a cry; then, "Give yourself—and her—a little more time," she said in a low voice; and as she uttered the words she knew that she was making the great, the supreme renunciation.

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PART IV

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CHAPTER XXV

He smarteth most who hides his smart, and sues for no compassion.

ANNE LEYCESTER sat awaiting a visit from her aunt, Madame Feyghine. As a rule, all communications between South Street and Sanctuary House were carried on by means of notes dictated to Mary Wratten, but that morning Gregor had brought a letter written by his mistress' own hand. In it Madame Feyghine told her niece that she desired to see her on important business, and that she proposed to call at Sanctuary House that afternoon at six o'clock, if she could hope at that hour to find her disengaged.

Familiarity does not always breed contempt; it often breeds instead an ever-deepening fear and feeling of distrust. Anne had always been afraid of her aunt, and that fear had deepened into dislike as the years had gone on. She knew that Madame Feyghine's outlook on life was materialistic,—that her philosophy, if robust, was that of an intelligent pagan. The younger woman, too, had always resented Madame Feyghine's contempt for her son's altruistic ideals, and, in that ever-deepening misunderstanding which had arisen of late years between Paul and his mother, Mrs. Leycester had whole-heartedly taken her cousin's part.

As to the struggle in which they had more recently been engaged concerning the necessity of Paul's return to Russia, Anne had scrupulously abstained from inter-

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ference. She knew that her cousin did not believe in the imminence of a conflict between Russia and Japan; and she regarded Madame Feyghine's frequent allusion to the probability of war as dictated solely by the mother's desire to see her son back in his native country.

This was actually the first time that Madame Feyghine had ever been in Sanctuary House. She had disapproved of her niece's action in coming to live, as she expressed it, in a slum; and she had never set by her presence the seal of her approval on Mrs. Leycester's action. So, to-day, Mrs. Leycester asked herself uneasily what important business could be bringing her aunt to Sanctuary House; instinct warned her that it had to do with Paul and his affairs.

At last Anne heard the old Feyghine carriage, drawn by the small black horses which had accompanied their owner to England, turn into the square, and stop before the gates of Sanctuary House. Had she been expecting any other woman of Madame Feyghine's age and standing, Mrs. Leycester would almost certainly have gone to the hall to welcome her, but to-day she sat quite still, following with quickened pulse and beating heart the little drama of arrival which she knew was taking place.

First came the sound of the iron gate being pushed open; then the footman's sharp pull of the old-fashioned bell, and the opening of the front door. Madame Feyghine's slow, heavy steps traversed the flagged courtyard,—the gate swung back,—then echoed the slamming of the heavy hall-door behind her, her sharp questioning of Anne's servant as to whether Mrs. Leycester was alone,—and then the listener heard the sound of her visitor's leisurely, scrutinizing progress down the broad passage which formed the centre of the roomy old house.

The large double doors of the drawing-room were at

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last flung open, and, as she entered the room,—as Anne walked forward to meet her,—it was clear that the self-bidden guest had come there meaning to make herself agreeable rather than otherwise, and this although there had been of late a certain marked coldness between Mrs. Leycester and her aunt.

Refusing the easy chair which her niece pushed forward, the old woman retreated far from the fire, and sat down on a high cane-chair,—then she motioned Anne Leycester to come close up to her, nay, she indicated the exact spot where she wished her hostess to be seated, and Anne rather nervously obeyed.

Behind Madame Feyghine were two lighted candles; thanks to them she was able to follow every change of expression on the face of her niece, while her own, yellow and worn to-day with emotion and fatigue, was more fitfully illumined by the tongues of flame which rose and fell in the deep fireplace exactly opposite to where she had chosen to seat herself.

Madame Feyghine looked about her with an air of grudging approval and even admiration,—then, "Will you please give strict orders," she said, "that we are not to be interrupted? I have come to speak to you on a matter of grave consequence, and I do not wish our conversation to be cut across by the sudden irruption of one of your interesting protégés. I am told that you have set up here, not so much as a 'marchande de bonheur,'—even you, Anne, would find that beyond your powers,—but as a 'marchande de consolation,' which is a much easier rôle, for all you have to do is to listen while fools, egoists, and charlatans pour out their griefs. Well, I myself am among your suppliants to-day, for I have come to you, if not exactly for sympathy, then certainly for advice."

"We shall not be interrupted, Aunt Letty," said Anne, quietly; "for unless I give orders to the contrary,

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no one is allowed to come in when I am receiving a visitor by appointment." She spoke very collectedly, but Madame Feyghine saw that she was ill at ease, and this emboldened the older lady to give her niece a few sharp raps before entering on the business which had brought her there.

"Good!" she exclaimed, "I had no idea that you were successful in surrounding yourself with such state; I wish Gregor was as well trained as your servants seem to be. I also had the idea, evidently an erroneous one, that Paul had ses grandes et petites entrées to your presence. By the way, when did you last see my son?"

"Yesterday," said Anne, "Paul was here for two hours."

As she uttered these apparently insignificant words, Mrs. Leycester felt herself in very truth Letty Feyghine's close kinswoman by blood; they were both Domvilles,—that is to say in their veins there ran many widely differing strains of blood, for there had been sinners as well as saints, rascals as well as honest men, born at Gaynesford Manor,—and for a moment Anne had felt as though the older woman's cruel and mocking spirit had taken possession of herself. Hence her shot—which told.

Madame Feyghine accepted the information she had asked for in silence, but she was aware, and she was persuaded that her niece also was aware, that Paul had not been near South Street for many days,—if he was too busy to come to his mother's house, he could always, it seemed, find time to waste in his cousin, Anne Leycester's company.

But all Madame Feyghine said was, "Why should we quarrel? Why should we say disagreeable things to one another?" And, as Anne made no answer, she bent forward and added with a quick look at the other's

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troubled face, "I do not know,—I have never quite understood,—my dear niece, your relations to my son Paul; but at any rate I think we may assume that you are attached to him, and that is why I have come here to-day. Indeed, if Paul only neglected me, his mother, for you, I should have very little to complain of! I am quite aware, Anne,"—Madame Feyghine again waited a moment, then, very deliberately, she concluded her sentence,—"that, *whatever other people may think*, the tie between you is a purely spiritual one."

Mrs. Leycester rose to her feet,—shame as well as disgust dyed her face red, for she realized that by stooping to Madame Feyghine's methods she had brought this abominable utterance on herself. "If you have come here to insult me, Aunt Letty, I cannot stay to listen to you," she said in a low voice, "but if you have anything to say concerning Paul which he would not mind your saying to me, I am of course ready to hear you."

"Tut! tut!" cried Madame Feyghine, "what great words are these? The thought of insulting you never entered my mind! I have had much to trouble and distress me the last few days, and that perhaps made me lose my temper, or rather appear to do so. But I apologize,—I ask your pardon,—for anything I may have said that put you out."

Then, as Anne again sat down, the old woman, who had not yet said her say, continued speaking, but as she spoke,—as her barbed and venomous sentences followed each other in quick sequence,—she carefully watched her niece, much as must have watched that mediæval physician whose duty it was to see that the rack did not cheat the scaffold of its victim.

"—But you must admit, my dear child, that anywhere, save in this extraordinary town of London, such close intimacy between an agreeable unmarried man and a

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charming widow would certainly lead to a great deal of talk. In Petersburg, for instance, Paul would be held to be greatly compromising you, especially as, according to the rules of our Church,—his and mine,—marriage between you is out of the question! Even in England the world has altered very much since I was a young woman; as old Gumberg said to me the other day, 'platonic liaisons are all the rage, dusty cobwebs have taken the place of honest flesh and blood!' But I belong to the old order, to a world—I am again quoting old Gumberg—which sang: 'So angels love, so let them love for me! When I'm all soul so let my love too be.' But that's by the way," she went on abruptly, smiling a harsh twisted smile. The patient on the rack was turning very white, and it was in quite a different tone that she next spoke:—

"I have come to ask you, Anne, to use your influence with your cousin, in order that you may persuade him to do what it has become urgently incumbent he should do. I know that you take small interest in public affairs,—almost as little as does Paul himself,—but still I presume you are aware that there is a possibility of a war between Russia and Japan? Some would tell you it is imminent; others that it will never come to pass. As for me, I do not know what to think——"

Anne quickened into deep attention; she recognized a new note in Madame Feyghine's voice,—the note of sincerity and anxiety.

"When the Grand Duke Paul was over here this summer," continued Madame Feyghine, unconsciously lowering her voice, "he came bearing a most gracious message from the Emperor, of which the practical outcome was that the old trouble was not only forgotten but obliterated, and that my son was marked as one of those to whom would be confided the great reforms which the Emperor intends to confer on his people.

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But Paul"—and the mother spoke slowly, reluctantly, —"refused to regard this informal invitation as serious, —as a command. And now that a second and far more urgent summons has come, bidding him join his old regiment without losing a day, he actually refuses to obey,—his pretext being that private matters require his presence in London."

The old woman stopped speaking; she seemed to expect her niece to make some comment, but Mrs. Leycester remained silent,—so silent that Madame Feyghine debated with herself uneasily as to whether she had not perhaps gone too far in her first words to Anne Leycester, in these barbed innuendoes prompted by jealous pain. And yet, even when she next spoke, Madame Feyghine could not forget—or forgive—Paul's close intimacy with his cousin.

"I may take it, I suppose, that you are in Paul's confidence? I have often been tempted to speak to you of certain matters—but I have refrained; now, however, the matter is too urgent for any feeling of delicacy, or—or pride, to restrain me. You and I must act together in his interest. If he cannot give up that woman,—if she refuses to let him go,—then for heaven's sake let him take her along with him! She won't be the first"—and then Madame Feyghine used a Biblical word which we are told no longer forms part of our chastened language, though the need for its use has not wholly disappeared, "who has accompanied a soldier to the wars."

"You are mistaken," said Mrs. Leycester coldly, "I am not in Paul's confidence, Aunt Letty,—and I know nothing, nothing of the woman to whom you are alluding."

"Nothing?" cried Madame Feyghine incredulously. "Bah! My dear Anne, that's impossible! You are not a child! All London knows that my son is the

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lover,—I should say perhaps the principal lover, le Monsieur qui paye,—of the famous dancer, Joaquina Nuñez."

Mrs. Leycester, from being very pale, again became very red. "You are the only person," she said coldly, "who has ever dared to allude to the fact before me. For you are again mistaken in thinking, Aunt Letty, that you have refrained from making allusions, very frequent allusions, to the subject. But I admit I have never allowed you to put what you have told me quite so plainly as you did just now."

"Well, now you must allow me to speak to you," replied Madame Feyghine, drily, "and that with the utmost plainness. This is not the moment to indulge in false delicacy,—you are morally bound to help me in this matter."

Mrs. Leycester's conscience suddenly assented. "I am quite ready to hear all you wish to tell me," she said gravely, and then for awhile sat with her eyes fixed on her aunt's face.

"Good! Perhaps I should begin by what is, after all, the most important thing in this life,—to wit, money. When we first came from Russia, Paul practically put his affairs into my hands,—that is to say, I managed all the English banking business for him; as you know, he is still something of a child, and then he was even more so than now. When he wanted money he came to me, and of course I always gave it to him most freely,—indeed, the first year he was here in London he spent marvellously little. Never was there such a good young man!"—there was mingled regret and mockery in the old woman's voice. "In fact," she continued, after a few moments, "he was in a sense too good, and I felt sure mischief would come of it. Do you remember, Anne, how ridiculously he devoted himself to that hospital for Russian sailors?"

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Mrs. Leycester made a quick, impatient movement, and Madame Feyghine paused. Was it possible that Anne thought her aunt was taking too long over her story? Then Madame Feyghine suddenly remembered that her son had been here only yesterday, and that for two hours,—and her heart grew very bitter. No, no, Anne should hear everything there was to hear,—on the other hand, she, Letty Feyghine, would not spare herself; she would tell the truth, and the whole truth, concerning this lamentable affair.

"It was about this time, my dear niece," she went on very deliberately, "that Paul formed an intimacy which caused me great uneasiness; I was myself away from London, but I heard of his growing friendship with a lady of whom I knew enough to persuade me that she would always keep him—in the sense to which I made allusion just now, and at which you took, heaven knows why, such deep offence—at arm's length. As I have already told you, I do not believe in platonic ties; still, I admit that, when they are once formed, they have a way of going on, of enduring, which is sometimes most tiresome. I felt, therefore, that such a friendship, with such a man as is my son, might ultimately mean his settling in England, and never going back to what is, after all, his own country——" She stopped speaking for a moment and looked fixedly at the woman sitting opposite to her, but Anne Leycester gave no sign of having understood; and so Letty Feyghine went on, hesitating a little, for what she was about to say was painful, even to herself.

"Do you remember Reyes, Anne? No? Ah, well, he was a very old friend of mine and of my husband, we had all been young together; he was one of those Spaniards who are more at home in Paris and London than in Madrid. He happened to be at Aix that year, the year of which I speak, and I told him of my

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anxieties. I said to him: 'You are a man of the world, and Paul is fond of you. Cannot you shake him up a bit?' I thought I was doing what was for the best," said Madame Feyghine meditatively, "but I made a mistake. It was Reyes, it seems, who introduced Paul to that creature,—to Joaquina Nuñez. He had not been back in London many days before he wrote me a letter,—I came across it somewhere the other day,—in which the postscript consisted of the words, 'You need have no fear of your son's turning into a monk! Our good Paul, I assure you, is made of very human flesh and blood.'"

Till this moment Mrs. Leycester had given no sign of what her aunt's confidences were costing her, but now she turned her head and suddenly sighed,—and her eyes became rimmed, circled about with shadows which had not been there a few moments before. It was not those of his patients who cried out most loudly, for whom the rack physician was wont to feel the greatest anxiety.

Even Madame Feyghine experienced a touch of concern and regret; but in comparison with her son, Anne Leycester was to her less than nothing. "Well? There does not remain much to say, for, innocent as you are, you can guess the rest. I soon found that Paul was spending large sums of money. At first he came to me for them, and then one day he abruptly told me that there must be a change,—that he would once more take possession of his income. I confess I then felt a momentary fear, but, after all, Paul is a rich man, and from what I learnt of his beloved one, it seemed as if the affair was not likely to eternalize itself. In one sense," she added frankly, "his choice did him honour, for Joaquina Nuñez is a very great dancer,—I have seen them all and I know what I am talking about,—but in another sense he has been

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unfortunate. The woman,—who is, by the way, half English and half Spanish, an unusual mixture,—is very capricious. She has given him, almost from the first, constant reason for jealousy; she clings to Paul because he is, as I hinted just now, the paymaster; but as a lover—no, no, Paul is not cut out for that part! So she supplements him——"

"Who tells you these things?" asked Anne, her face still turned away. "Is it old Gregor?"

"I have my own police," answered Paul's mother, grimly, "—and I have discovered many things. But in truth he makes no secret of his infatuation. When he wishes to go to her, he does not trouble to give an order to his driver—he merely makes two taps on the window in the roof of his cab and the man understands without need of words!"

Anne thought of that midnight drive from Hague House to the bedside of Nicolette; she remembered that the driver had then seemed to need no directions, —and again she sighed a quick, fluttering sigh, wrung from her extremity of pain.

The old woman gave her a rather anxious look, but still she could not forbear turning the knife in the wound,—Anne should know, at last, the truth: "I could tell you things, my dear niece, which would surprise you about our staid Paul. To give you an idea of the kind of influence this creature possesses over my son—some time ago, in what they now call a musical comedy, a stupid, vulgar thing entitled 'The Queen of Hearts,' this Joaquina played a leading rôle. I had the curiosity to go and see her, and imagine what I felt when I saw she was wearing—you would never guess, Anne, what I saw gleaming on her breast,—a replica, an exact replica, in finer stones, of *my* decoration, the great ruby heart which you may have seen me wearing ages ago, and which, if Paul does not marry, and there seems no

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likelihood that he will do so now, I intend to leave to you!"—and then, as Anne made an almost violent gesture of repudiation: "No matter," she added hastily, "we are not here now to talk about my will, but about Paul. The situation is further complicated by the fact that some weeks ago he bribed her to leave off dancing—she's supposed to be delicate, in need of rest!"

There was a long pause. Madame Feyghine seemed waiting impatiently for her niece to make some comment on all that she had just heard; and at last Anne Leycester turned once more, showing her aunt a grey, expressionless face.

"What is it you wish me to do, Aunt Letty? Why should you suppose that I shall succeed where you have tried and failed? If what you tell me is true,"—and, as Madame Feyghine was about to speak, she quickly added, "nay, I do not doubt the truth of all you have told me,—Paul will not leave this woman, and she, on her side, will certainly not wish to follow him, as you suggest she might do, to Russia. All this being so, and you have made it very clear, why should you expect my words to weigh with him?"

"Because," cried Madame Feyghine, "I very nearly succeeded myself in making him do his duty! Paul's conscience is uneasy; he admitted to me that, if this war were really to break out, he would feel himself bound to go. Then, again, even since I spoke to him, the affair—I mean of course his liaison with this woman—has taken a new turn. My informants—for I have more than one,—(Poor old Gregor," the aside was uttered with a slight smile, "is not so treacherous as you seem to think him,)—declare that, in spite of the immense sum Paul has just squandered on her in order to persuade her to retire from the stage, the dancer is even now meaning to break her promise. Everything was arranged, it seems, a week ago, for them to leave

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London together, but she has now determined to stay."

Madame Feyghine lifted her black silk skirt, and out of a pocket which hung from her waist, and which contained all her more precious possessions,—her keys, the roll of banknotes she always carried about her, and one or two cherished souvenirs of Paul's father,—she drew a few crumpled pieces of newspaper. "Look," she said, "at these, Anne!"—and Mrs. Leycester, holding out a reluctant hand, saw that they were scraps of news cut from various papers.

"A friend of mine," explained Madame Feyghine, "collects for me everything about Joaquina Nuñez, and now scarce a day goes by but there is printed a communiqué about the creature's future movements. Sometimes it is that the great, the famous, the marvellous Joaquina is about to appear in a new ballet,—another time that she is on the point of returning once more to the scene of her first triumphs, that is to Paris!—then, again, that she has been invited to visit America! All lies, no doubt; but to me it looks as if she were giving Paul trouble. He is determined, so I am told, that she shall not return to the stage, at any rate for some months."

Madame Feyghine had now said all that she had come to say. She felt sure that she had made the double impression she had come to make, and she trusted to Anne Leycester's jealousy more than to her unselfish love for Paul. The old woman got up and began slowly walking round the room, commending the water-colours hanging on the walls, discussing the few pieces of fine furniture, as though she had come to Sanctuary House intent on admiring its contents and paying its mistress compliments. "And now," she said at last, "I must be going home; for it would be distinctly unfortunate were I to run, as it were, into

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Paul's arms. If he came here yesterday, I suppose it is quite likely that he will come here to-day?"

"I do not know," said Anne, uneasily, "he does not often come in the afternoon." She regretted her words as a look of displeasure came over Madame Feyghine's face. "Then your influence over him," said the old woman, "must be even greater than I supposed,—I imagined that he always spent his evenings with the charmer of whom we have been speaking, but sometimes, it seems, when too much occupied to come to South Street, he is with you. Well, I can but hope that he will come to-night, for in the matter of our going to Russia time presses."

"Then you intend to go too?" asked Anne, surprised.

"Certainly I do," said Madame Feyghine, sharply; "what should I be doing in England if Paul was in Petersburg or—or Manchuria? By the way, I forgot to tell you one rather important fact,—Joaquina Nuñez is the mother of a child which Paul, in his less lucid moments, believes to be his own. This, of course, is an added complication, but one to which perhaps you will be wise to make no allusion——"

She walked towards the door, and then suddenly turned round: "I have your promise, Anne? The matter is serious,—more so, perhaps, than I have made quite clear. If Paul persists in disregarding the commands of his Emperor, as well as of his military chiefs, he runs a risk of our estates being confiscated, and that would not suit him—or Joaquina Nuñez—at all!"

"Yes, I will speak to him, Aunt Letty, in the sense you wish. I agree with you that he should go to Russia."

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CHAPTER XXVI

There is no tongue that moves, none, none in the world,
So soon as yours could win me : so it should now,
Were there necessity in your request.

THE moment her aunt had gone, Anne Leycester's heart began to misgive her, and the thought of the task before her filled her with foreboding. She wondered uneasily if Madame Feyghine had indeed told her the whole truth; it is the Nemesis of the very astute that when once their power of twisting the human beings about them to their own ends is gauged, their speech, however sincere it may be on occasion, is never accepted as being wholly free from guile.

Madame Feyghine, like most clever people accustomed to have their own way in life, knew when it behoved her to speak the simple truth, and she had judged that, as regarded this to her all-important matter, it would be far better for her to conceal nothing from her niece. She had waited and hesitated long before speaking to Mrs. Leycester, for she had always been jealous of her son's close intimacy with his cousin. Till quite lately, however, Paul had always been outwardly submissive and deferential to herself, but now he had changed. He avoided seeing his mother alone, and he absolutely refused to discuss with her the question of their return to Russia. Madame Feyghine had come to Sanctuary House eager to win Anne Leycester to her view of what it was imperative and necessary that Paul should do; then the know-

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ledge that he could apparently always find time to come there, though too much engrossed elsewhere to wait on his mother, had so angered her that she had found it impossible to forbear saying cruel and cutting things concerning the relations between her son and Mrs. Leycester; still she had kept, even when discussing these relations, strictly to what she believed to be the truth. This being so, Madame Feyghine would have been extremely annoyed had she known in how uncertain and doubting a frame of mind she had left the woman on whom she had wasted a commodity of which she was not often so prodigal.

Anne Leycester felt the more anxious and uneasy as to her aunt's real motives because she herself had not been wholly frank during the long, painful conversation. She knew more of Paul's private affairs than she had admitted knowing, and that although the words she had uttered had been true in fact, if not in substance. Then again,—to be sure, it was a small matter,—but she had allowed Madame Feyghine to leave her quite ignorant that she expected Paul to come to Sanctuary House that night; he would be there about nine, and doubtless would stay till eleven. Already on Anne's writing-table there were a number of papers and letters which she had set aside to show him; one part of his nature had remained keenly interested in the ordinary routine of her philanthropic work, and in helping her he sometimes forgot his cares and humiliations.

But the principal reason why Mrs. Leycester was unwilling to touch on the difficult and delicate question of her cousin's return to Russia, was that during the last few weeks a curious change had come over Paul Feyghine. He was still apparently in need of the unquestioning, wordless sympathy she was always so ready to lavish on him, but a sure instinct had told her

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that certain conditions connected with his other life had altered, and it was this, partly, which made her doubt her aunt's detailed statement of how matters stood just then between himself and Joaquina Nuñez. Anne was convinced that in certain ways Paul was now more at peace than he had been for years. The devils of jealousy and suspicion no longer dwelt with him; some change which had restored to him his own self-respect had come over his relations with the woman whose actual name Mrs. Leycester had heard pronounced for the first time that day.

A wise man has written, "Never show a wound except to a physician," but, though Paul Feyghine had never bared his heart to Anne Leycester, not only had she always known that the wound was there, but she had even been able to follow, with peculiar power of divination, the state in which he found himself at any given moment. The fact that she had made no attempt, even after the night she had spent with Nicolette, to probe that which he had always kept hidden from her, made her not only dearer, but actually nearer, to himself than was the mother who by devious ways had contrived to learn so much.

Anne found the two hours which elapsed between the departure of her aunt and the arrival of Paul Feyghine very long and painful to live through. The conversation had jarred and pained her inexpressibly; and at last, tired of her own thoughts, she sought refuge with Dr. Mitroff, himself at present a sad enough companion, for he was not one of those who find it easy or agreeable to accept even the most delicately administered charity, and his relapse into illness had been to him an almost unendurable disappointment.

She found him sitting up, intent on the translating

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work which his ill-nourished brain made so difficult, almost impossible, for him to do; but as she came into the room, he pushed away the blank sheet of paper spread out before him with a gesture of relief.

"Your visitor stayed a long time," he said: "Believe me, you are wrong to allow people to tire you like that. Why do you not say to them—'I'm very sorry, but you must go now, for there's a poor devil of a man upstairs who is dying, and whom I have taken in out of charity, and after having listened to you, I shall have to go and listen to him'? If you would only say that to these egoists who come and plague you, I should feel that I was being of use to you after all—— You must admit that you would have done wisely to do what I've just suggested in the case of the person who has been boring you to-day. I heard the voice—hum, hum, hum, hum,—why she must have been here a very long time!"

"Yes," said Anne smiling, "but in this case I could not have pleaded you as an excuse, for the visitor was my aunt, Madame Feyghine, and she seemed in great trouble. She is thinking of going back to Russia, she believes that there is going to be war;—what do you think about it, Dr. Mitroff?"

Mitroff looked up at her sharply: "I see what it is," he exclaimed, "your lady aunt is afraid for her son! If there is war, he will of course have to go back,—is he not an officer of the Guard? Her maternal heart betrays her, for there will not be a war, of that I am convinced——" He stared furtively at Anne. She had looked so sad, so pale when she had first come into the room, but what he had just said would surely reassure her as to any danger to Paul Feyghine.

"Do you think it possible," asked Anne suddenly, —and as she spoke she turned away, unable to meet the Russian's suffering, mocking eyes,—"that a delay on my

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cousin's part in obeying orders from his commanding officers could result in his fortune being seized or his estates confiscated?"

"Our Government," replied Mitroff slowly, "is like Great Jove,—no one ever knows when the thunderbolt may fall. But Mr. Feyghine has high protections at Court. I should say that he was safer than most, though of course before now Grand Dukes themselves have been disgraced, and for such trifling reasons!—for being in love, for instance, with the wrong lady!"

Mrs. Leycester left Dr. Mitroff feeling that her few words with him had not made her any the more ready to fulfil her promise to Madame Feyghine.

As she dressed for dinner, some proud instinct of feminine modesty made her determine to avoid even the slightest, the most legitimate appeal to the eyes of the man she loved and whom she was about to offend. She put on a plain, high, black gown, one of those she had worn in the earlier days of her widowhood; she knew well that her cousin, like all Russians, delighted in bright colours, and as she caught sight of her pale, grave face, she suddenly hoped that he would not come, that he would disappoint her, as he had so often done before. And yet she knew well enough that very soon he would be there; for some weeks past no day had gone by without his coming in, sometimes only for a few moments, sometimes for hours; his life had lately become, so she was sure, far more dependent on his own and not on another's wishes.

A little before nine o'clock,—that is, some minutes before he had told her to expect him,—Feyghine was shown in, and, looking at him, Anne saw with a pang that he seemed very tired, as well as older and sadder than usual. Yet, had she known it, as soon as he found himself in her presence there had come on Paul Fey-

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ghine a feeling of relief, of restfulness, like to that which comes to a man who, if only for a moment, is able to shift a burden which galls him.

With a softened face he looked round the room which to him had become the one place of refuge where he was sure of finding unfailing, unquestioning sympathy. He fixed his eyes, wearied, though she neither knew nor suspected it, with much watching at night, on his cousin; she was not in her usual seat on the other side of the fire; instead, she had retreated rather far into the shadow.

"You look very gloomy!" he exclaimed. "Why do you sit out there, so far away, and why are you wearing that black dress?"

"It *is* gloomy," she admitted. "Looking back to that year I spent in Russia, one of the pleasantest things I remember, Paul, was the white gowns that everyone wore. I wonder Aunt Letty even does not wear white; she would have to do so if she were in St. Petersburg instead of in London!"

"My mother," said Paul, rather shortly, "is an Englishwoman. When she is in London she poses as a Russian, and when she is in Russia she delights in reminding those about her that she is a daughter of the Union Jack. I suppose we are all rather like that, for, since I have lived in England, I myself have felt increasingly at war with all the ways and customs which obtain here."

"Just now," said Anne hesitatingly, "you must be feeling a great deal of interest in the Russo-Japanese affair,"—her words sounded stilted and unnatural. "But I suppose you do not agree with Aunt Letty,—I mean you are inclined to think that there will be no war? You do not believe what people say here?"

Feyghine felt unreasonably jarred and irritated by his cousin's questions. As a rule, Anne Leycester fell

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only too easily into his mood, and even during the last few weeks, she had never spoken to him of that approaching conflict of which all the world was talking. Doubtless, however, she was not aware how hateful the whole subject had become to him, and Paul felt ashamed of his irritation; even more so of his ungracious words concerning her gown and her country.

"No," he said, "I do not believe what English people are saying. Doubtless there will in time come a war between Russia and Japan, but I notice that Hayashi declares that the Elder Statesmen of his subtle country do not regard the rather impertinent answer they sent a day or two ago to Petersburg as in any sense an ultimatum." He picked up a paper lying on a table at his elbow; Anne felt that he wished to end the conversation.

"I have promised to give Dr. Mitroff a book." She got up, then when close to the door added, "I shall not be more than a few moments."

When she returned she was wearing a white gown, and as she sat down opposite to Feyghine she smiled, a little tremulously; he leant forward and patted her hand, much as he might have done that of a favourite younger sister who had just performed some action which had pleased him. "That's right!" he exclaimed, "you look more cheerful now."

"But, though Aunt Letty seems uncertain as to whether there will actually be war," observed Anne slowly,—she tried to speak as if there had been no interruption to their former conversation,—"she is evidently very uneasy. She told me to-day that the Grand Dukes had all returned to St. Petersburg, and that your godfather had resumed the personal command of his regiment."

"Yes, that's true," he said, and then sharply, "but à propos of what did my mother say this? Were you at

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South Street to-day? I called there about five o'clock, and they told me my mother had been out all the afternoon?"

"Aunt Letty came here," said Anne reddening.

"Here?" exclaimed Feyghine, "how very extraordinary! Did she tell you that she was going to Petersburg?"

"Yes, she spoke of it. She also spoke of your going, Paul; she seemed to think it of the highest importance that you should do so."

Mrs. Leycester had risen from her chair, and was now standing by the fire, a tall, slender figure full of the grace which was her greatest feminine charm; and as she spoke the words she had promised to speak, she held out, with a nervous movement, her foot to the flames. She did not look at her cousin; what she had just done had cost her a great effort, and, perhaps foolishly, she had suddenly made up her mind that Paul should know she was speaking to-night at another's bidding.

He also got up and leant his right arm on the corner of the mantelpiece. "Do you know," he said quietly, looking down at her, "when I first received orders to go to Petersburg,—I mean when I was first asked to return?"

"Yes—that is, no. Your mother told me that your godfather asked you to go back this summer; was it not in July that the Grand Duke was here?"

"July," he said, "and early August. My mother, for reasons best known to herself, begged him to assist her in the efforts she has now been making for so long to compel me to return to Russia. From the moment they met,—I think you were there that afternoon, it was on a Sunday,—I have received so many summons from so many different people, and couched in such very different terms, that it has become quite mono-

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tonous. You remember that day in October when it was said that war was actually declared? Well, my mother almost got me off then; if she could have bereft me of sight and hearing for twenty-four hours, she would have had her will; unfortunately for her scheme, the story was a Stock Exchange *canard*."

Feyghine's voice was full of concentrated bitterness and contempt; and then perhaps his conscience smote him, for he added more quietly: "Of course my mother in her heart does not think there is going to be war; had she accomplished her desire, had we proceeded to Petersburg together, she would have engaged at once in an intrigue for getting me some post which—in the very unlikely event of war—would have kept me safe in Petersburg! My mother has paid her full toll to Mars and Bellona; believe me she has no wish to see me also made into food for cannon; she would appeal to my godfather, who is tender-hearted where only sons are concerned, and then, when all my comrades were off on their way to the front, I should find myself left behind ingloriously engaged in affixing my signature to bills for war stores!"

He began walking up and down the room, and went on with increasing irritation, "No, no; when war is declared you will see a great change! The rôles will be reversed—it is I who will be eager to go, and my mother who will then desire me to stay. She has long wished that we should return to Russia, and the rumours of this phantom conflict gave her the excuse she has been looking for. I did not think," he added, "that she would actually go so far as to ask you, Anne, to join in the plot," and as Mrs. Leycester made no answer, he angrily exclaimed: "Everyone round us has been pressed into the service! She has told all the old friends that I am going; whenever I am in South Street, I have to cudgel my brains

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to make up answers to the fools who speak to me on the subject!"

"But is there any reason,—any serious reason,—why you should not go?" said Anne. "Forgive me, Paul, for it is true, as you say, that your mother has begged me to join my entreaties to hers."

"Here, at any rate, I felt safe from persecution!" he spoke with sharp anger. "Of course there is a reason—indeed, a thousand good reasons—why I should not do as she wishes! If the war really comes, I repeat that you will not find me hanging back, but I tell you I am no longer fitted for the existence which I should have to lead in my own country. You know, better than anyone else, what kind of life I had made there; I was happy, and I was,—at least I think I may say so,—of some use in the world. Then all that came to an end, and why?"—he waited, and then in a different, in a changed voice, speaking with a cold reasonableness very unlike his usual tone, he looked at her and said:—

"I do not blame you, Anne, for what you have done. I know my mother better than you do; I realize what she is like when she is determined on a certain course. Were she dealing with anyone's son but her own, she would probably have her way; but it happens that I have inherited her obstinacy of disposition. I shall go when it suits me, and not a moment sooner,—but meanwhile, till the whole matter is settled one way or the other, I had better not come here, to Sanctuary House. I know my mother—you will see her to-morrow, she will come to ask if you have seen me, she will compel you to report to her what I said, and she will deduce certain wrong conclusions from our conversation. Hitherto this has been the one place where I was safe from this eternal, this humiliating, discussion, but now everything is changed. If you and I do not speak of the subject, my mother will be angry with

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you,—and if we do, then the happiness I have always enjoyed in your company will be wholly destroyed."

Anne could see that he was very hurt and very angry, and she longed to beg him to wipe out this evening from both their memories,—to behave as though this conversation had never been. But mingled feelings of pain, of pride, and a touch perhaps of the Domville obstinacy of which Paul had already boasted of possessing his full share, kept her silent.

He held out his hand and took hers, wrung it with a certain emotion, and a moment later she heard the iron gate of the courtyard fall to behind him.

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CHAPTER XXVII

Il n'y a rien de doux comme le retour de joie qui suit le renoncement de la joie; rien de vif, de profond, de charmant comme l'enchantement du désenchanté.

FRANCIS DOMVILLE stood in the sitting-room which he shared with his cousin, Paul Feyghine. In his hand he held a telegram, and he was wondering whether he should simply send it on to where he knew his cousin had been spending the last three days, or whether he should himself take the long, unpleasant journey to Islington in order to deliver it in person. The telegram, though addressed to Feyghine, had been already opened. It had arrived from South Street a few moments before, and the fact that it had been sent on by Madame Feyghine without a word of comment, and enclosed to her nephew instead of to her son, showed the gravity with which Paul's mother regarded its contents. Domville realized the unspoken appeal conveyed by this fact,—an appeal made to himself by the proud old woman. He spread out the oblong piece of paper and held it up frowning—"Prière et ordre de venir instantanément—Paul Sergievitch."

With an impatient exclamation of disgust and annoyance, for Domville was not in a happy mood to-day, he prepared to go out. The Grand Duke's telegram was too serious to be entrusted to any hand but his own, however sure; he must go and find his cousin, and compel him, not only to read, but to understand all that

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was meant by, this mingled entreaty and command on the part of one who wished him well.

If there was to be no war between Russia and Japan, as Paul even now believed, then would it not still, even at this late moment, be possible for Feyghine to take the journey to St. Petersburg, report himself, and then return to England? It certainly would not suit Paul, and still less Joaquina,—a look of contempt and aversion swept over Domville's face as he thought of the dancer,—were the great Feyghine estates to be confiscated, were the golden tide that flowed so steadily from Russia to be suddenly dried up. Domville was aware that the fear of this was very present to Madame Feyghine, who, English though she was, knew a good deal more than her Russian son did of Russian methods of dealing with those who were rebels against authority.

As he was leaving his rooms, an elderly man, whose face he vaguely knew, came up to him: "I think, Sir," he said, "that you are Mr. Domville? If so, I have a letter for you for which I am to wait an answer."

Domville tore open the envelope and glanced quickly at the note; it was written in a delicate, precise writing he had once known very well. The small, old-fashioned notepaper bore the address—"Archbishop's House, Westminster,"—and the note was worded with that economy of useless phrasing which always distinguished the writer:

"Dear Mr. Domville, I should be obliged if you could make it convenient to call on me at three o'clock this afternoon. Yours truly,"—then the Christian name, followed by the abbreviations, Card. Archbp.

Domville hesitated a moment—

"His Eminence told me to say," observed the man, "that a verbal answer would do."

"—In that case," cried Domville, relieved, "tell his Eminence that I will be with him at three o'clock."

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Four hours later Francis Domville was waiting in the long room where the Cardinal always received his visitors. He felt tired and dispirited, for his dreary journey to Islington had been of no avail. Paul Feyghine had read the telegram his cousin had been at the pains of bringing him, without comment, and had thrown it aside as if it concerned a matter of no moment. Then, after listening silently to what Domville had forced himself to say, he had broken out with angry passion. "Why are you all set upon torturing me? First my mother, then Anne Leycester, and now you—you whom I believed to be the one human being who would leave me alone—who would understand—even if he did not sympathize with—the reasons which are making me act as I am doing!"

The interview had taken place in the dining-room of the mediæval building, and Joaquina's portrait looked down with a superb air of indifference and insolent detachment on the two men's painful debate.

Suddenly Feyghine walked round the table to where the other stood facing him in the waning light of a February afternoon. He put a heavy hand on Domville's shoulder. "I, also," he exclaimed roughly, "have been minded to give you good advice during the last few weeks! I, also, have longed for your confidence; to have heard of your griefs might have eased my pain. You think I have been so absorbed in what is going on up here that I have been blind—that I have seen nothing. But that's a mistake, Francis! I know you quite as well as you know me, and perhaps even better! I don't know what's ailing you exactly, and you must admit I've made no effort to find out, but of course it's a woman,"—and as Domville shook his head angrily, the other added, with a certain contempt, —"of course it is! You cannot deceive me! Englishmen make a pretence of not feeling such things, but

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I know better! You are now feeling what I have felt for years,—you are now being tortured as I have been tortured; at last,"—there was a sombre triumph in his voice,—"you know what has made me what I am!"

Then, in answer to the other's gesture of denial: "Each of us thinks his jade different from every other jade—naturally. But they're all alike, there's less difference than you think between Joaquina and the woman,—I've not the slightest idea who she is, but I suppose she's the *respectable* wife of one of your friends,—who's been causing you to look as you have looked of late. I've often longed to say things to you,—the kind of things you've said to me in the past; I've longed to plague you with unsolicited advice,—but you must admit that I've refrained, Francis, from interfering in your affairs, and, in return, I must beg that you will not interfere in mine."

They had parted very coldly, and Domville had sworn to himself, not for the first time, that henceforth he would leave his cousin to dree his own weird. The knowledge that Feyghine had arrived so nearly at the truth irked him exceedingly; did others suspect,—not what had happened, that was utterly impossible,—but the state of body and soul to which, for the first time in his life, he had been brought by a woman? Only the other day he had met Rose Hassal,—by the way, she was Rose Barton now,—just back from her honeymoon, and she had said to him teasing, mysterious words concerning the state of his heart; she had spoken as if he and she shared some secret together, and he, entering into her mood, had laughed and mocked grimly at himself. . . .

Well, as Feyghine refused to go to Russia, he, Domville, would go down to Gaynesford. That would be one way of facing the situation in which he found himself; thus surely would the wound that still gaped be

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cauterized. He would go there this very afternoon, after his interview with the Cardinal, and so would he avoid an imperious summons from Madame Feyghine.

Having so determined, he felt for a moment less sore and more at leisure to wonder why he had been sent for here. He looked round the library in which he now found himself with kindly eyes, remembering that he had once been a frequent and a welcome visitor here. But many years had gone by since that had been so, and, while waiting for the Cardinal Archbishop to appear from the inner room,—the real living room of the old Churchman,—to which Domville had at one time been so often admitted, he began to question rather uneasily as to why the Cardinal wished to see him. He could think of but one reason. Father Copley was now better in health, and eager, it seemed, to get back to hard London work; doubtless he was now about to be told of the priest's removal from Gaynesford, and consulted concerning his successor.

At last, after Domville had been waiting about ten minutes, he saw the still upright and yet frail figure of the aged Cardinal coming towards him, clad in the shabby cassock and long, old-fashioned coat bordered with the traditional red, which were his usual winter-wear.

The young man leapt to his feet, and walked forward; as he knelt on one knee, and brushed with his lips the episcopal ring, he felt his hand grasped in a warm, kindly clasp, and the parchment-coloured, diaphanous-looking old face lit by eyes which still kept something of the bright intensity of youth, looked down at him with a softened, almost playful, expression. Domville, meeting that benignant gaze, told himself, with a quick feeling of surprise, that the Cardinal had changed,—perhaps grown more merciful, more indulgent to poor fallible human nature,—since they had last been thus familiarly together.

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"I thank you," said his host in firm, penetrating tones, "for having so quickly acceded to my wish to see you. You have probably been walking; if so, we will sit over here, far from the fire;" and he led the way across to a round table on which there already stood two lighted candles. There the Cardinal sat down, and, motioning to his visitor to do likewise, he opened the conversation by the words: "Have you lately come from Gaynesford?"

"No, I have not been there for some considerable time." Unknown to himself a look of strong pain had come over Domville's face at the mention of the place. He added, "But I am thinking of going down there this afternoon. I am always made welcome at the presbytery."

"Father Copley," said the Cardinal rather absently, "is an excellent fellow. I shall be glad to have him back in London. But if you are on your way to Gaynesford I must not detain you over long."

He hesitated; for the first time in what had been their long, and at one time a close, acquaintance, the Cardinal Archbishop was evidently ill at ease. The smile faded wholly from his face, the muscles of which twitched nervously.

"I have sent for you in order to perform a very delicate task, with which I was entrusted only yesterday. It is the first time," he went on, speaking very slowly and deliberately, "that I have undertaken such a mission; and I may tell you that at first I was disposed to refuse. . . . Then I said to myself, 'Francis Domville will forgive what may seem to him an impertinence more readily from an old man, and one who, as I am sure he knows, wishes him very well, than he would if the same task were performed by an utter stranger, or —or by a woman.'"

Domville moved slightly in his chair; his heart

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began to beat with—what was it?—apprehension or hope?

"I have been asked to convey to you an offer," continued the Cardinal, "of a kind which is, I fancy, far more often made abroad than in our own country."

There was a long, uncomfortable pause. The Cardinal put on his spectacles and looked searchingly at the man sitting opposite to him on the other side of the table; then, very abruptly, he uttered the words, "In fact I have been asked, my dear Francis Domville, to make you an offer of marriage, on behalf of a lady of whom I think you already know something——" As Domville remained silent, he added rather hurriedly: "I should add that this offer is made with the full assent of her family and friends, and, further, that your interests and your dignity are to be fully safeguarded. In fact, the lady in question is prepared to do what many men belonging to her caste have willingly done from the same motive which is apparently actuating her,—but it remains of course for you to say if you are willing to accept the position—a position, I need hardly tell you, not without very special difficulties and drawbacks."

"And what," said Domville in a low voice, "would your Eminence advise me to do?"

The Cardinal looked up sharply; he saw that the man before him was greatly, nay terribly, moved, and the question took him greatly by surprise. "It is not exactly a syllogism in Barbara," he said meditatively; then,—"There was, I believe, a former proposition made to you,—one which you very rightly rejected?" As he stated this fact, or rather asked this question, the speaker again fixed his piercing eyes on Domville's flushed face.

"Yes," said Domville, looking straight at the old man, "I did reject it, and I have no doubt that I was, as you

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say, quite right to do so. But—but I've been in hell ever since."

Both as Churchman, and as an old-fashioned Englishman abhorring modern exaggeration and any word that savoured of irreverence, the Cardinal had a great dislike, almost a contempt, for a certain type of extravagant simile; but he heard the answer returned by Domville with such a feeling of relief that he had no wish to quarrel with the words, nay the word, which had suddenly made clear the way before him.

"Yes?" he said musingly. "Just so. Well, in that case, speaking as your friend, and making use of your own rather violent simile, my advice to you is,—do not be in too great a hurry to enter Heaven! Whatever your final decision may be, take now a certain number of hours, even of days, for consideration. When you came to me to-day you were on your way to Gaynesford; go on there, by all means, and think the matter well over from every point of view,"—the Cardinal concluded very gravely, "and do not be ashamed to pray for guidance."

Francis Domville stood up. He supposed the audience to be at an end; he longed to be alone,—out of reach of these piercing if kindly eyes. He was shaken with conflicting and bewildering emotions,—all the more powerful that he was making,—so he flattered himself, so successful an effort to conceal them.

But the Cardinal remained seated. "One word more," from his tone was scrupulously banished every vestige of sympathy or curiosity. "Before you leave me I should perhaps hand you this letter. Till a few moments ago I meant to take on myself the responsibility of keeping you ignorant of its existence, but the words you used just now, descriptive of your state of mind, formed, I venture to believe, a clue to your final decision."

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He drew a letter from the inside pocket of his long, red-bordered cassock, and Domville saw that the envelope was sealed with a black seal. "This is quite outside the formal negotiations in which we have just been engaged," said the Cardinal. "In fact, no one but the writer of this letter and myself knew, till a moment ago, of its existence,"—and, as Domville held out his hand, the old man added a little hurriedly: "You need not read it now. Perhaps you would prefer to wait until you leave me before making yourself acquainted with its contents?"

"No," said Domville, "with your Eminence's permission I will read it now."

He got up and walked down the long room till he stood by the fireplace. He broke the seal slowly, and with bent head looked down at the sheet of paper,—of hotel note-paper, headed "Babbage's, Brook-street,"—on which were written but a few lines, and then the signature, consisting only of a woman's name. It took Domville a long time to master its contents, but at last, very suddenly, he leant forward and thrust letter and envelope into the living heart of the large fire.

While this little drama was taking place,—for to the Cardinal there was something singularly dramatic in the episode,—a very different scene rose up before the old Churchman's mind. Some three months before, his Eminence, who regarded perhaps too little the humanizing effects of social amenities, had formed one of a house-party in a historic Catholic house. Among the guests had been included a young lady, a certain Miss Rose Hassal, of whom even the Cardinal had heard, but whom—so completely lived he apart from the fashionable world—he had not yet met, and had not wished to meet, for what he had heard of Miss Hassal had created a strong prejudice in the old man's mind. Then, on the very first evening there occurred

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something which surprisingly modified his opinion of that young lady, and even made him feel her to be in sympathy with himself. This was what had happened.

A group of the noble host's guests were gathered together in the library, standing round a glass cabinet in which were preserved the most precious relics connected with his house. Perhaps the most priceless of these was a love-letter written by Mary Queen of Scots during her long captivity, for the host's Elizabethan ancestor had been one in whom the Queen had for a while put all her hopes and trust. She had written to him, not only as a sovereign might to a great noble who hoped to save and then to wed her, but as writes a woman to the man she loves. . . .

In order to afford a moment's entertainment to the distinguished house-party, the piece of stained parchment had been taken out of the case, and spread out on a table, and only two of those present, Miss Hassal and the old Cardinal, had taken the trouble to spell out a Queen's passionate words of love, or rather of wooing. And then, quite suddenly, the colour had deepened on the young lady's fair cheek, and, provoked perhaps by a rather fatuous remark made by her youthful host, expressing the opinion that his fortunate ancestor had run a great personal risk in not at once destroying so compromising a love-letter, Rose Hassal had looked up and exclaimed: "Your ancestor may have been a brave man, but he was also a most undoubted cad!"

"A cad!" had repeated the other, taken aback and frowning.

"Most certainly a cad—to have kept this letter a moment after he had read it! Doesn't your Eminence agree with me?" and she had turned to the old man standing by her side.

"I think," the Cardinal had answered with a certain formality, "that there are love-letters which should

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unquestionably be destroyed by their recipients as soon as read."

And now, watching Domville, and witnessing Domville's destruction of the letter which had just been put into his hand, the looker-on remembered that curious scene, and he felt glad to think that the man before him showed himself, in these hard commonplace days, possessed of a more delicate sense of honour than had been the Elizabethan noble whose dalliance with a Queen came to so tragic an end.

Chivalry in these days is too often its own reward. Be that as it may, Francis Domville walked back with a strange glow on his face to where the Cardinal now stood waiting for him. Perhaps the fire over which he had leant so nearly had deepened the flush on his forehead, perhaps the words he had taken so long to decipher had warmed his heart as nothing before had ever warmed it.

"I think," he said, and it seemed to the Cardinal that Francis Domville had regained the eager, confident voice of his early youth, "that I ought to leave you now. I am grateful, far more so than I know how to say, for all your kindness to me to-day."

"I hope you will still have time to catch the train you had in your mind to catch," said the Cardinal thoughtfully, and he rose from his chair, and prepared to escort his visitor across the room.

Domville looked at him uncertainly, and then, as if the sense of the old man's words had but just reached him, "Oh, yes," he said, "yes, I shall certainly have time, even, I think, to walk, to Vauxhall."

The Cardinal, standing alone in his great room, felt his thoughts taking an odd turn; he did not often allow his mind to travel back over the long years which separated his present from his past life, but, as he paced up and down after a fashion which was usual with him

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when perplexed, he murmured, half-aloud, to himself: "I wonder how long it would have taken me, say fifty years ago, to have walked from here to Brook Street? I think I should have walked,—I feel sure I should have walked,—for I should have felt safer, less afraid of the Fates, on my feet. And yet—yet Francis Domville was almost quite sincere, in those last words he said."

His Eminence went out of the door through which Domville had just gone; he crossed at right-angles the cold stone passage, and so found himself in a large room which was the throne room of his singular palace. At one end of this room wide windows looked down to the street, and the old man made his way to one of these windows and stood in the darkness looking down into the lighted street.

A tall man crossed the roadway below, and stood on the opposite pavement; he seemed to be hesitating, then, suddenly, he turned on his heel and made his way rapidly westward. "Fifty years ago," repeated the Cardinal, in the same musing tone; "I *think* I could have walked it in twelve minutes."

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CHAPTER XXVIII

Ah, dear, but come thou back to me!
Whatever change the days have wrought
I find not yet one lonely thought
That cries against my wish for thee!

PERHAPS the Cardinal belonged to a generation given to performing greater feats than fall to the lot of the modern lover. Be that as it may, it took Francis Domville more than twelve minutes to walk from Archbishop's House to Brook Street, and yet those who noted him pass on his way with bent head would have told you that no man ever walked so fast. It seemed to himself that his mind was empty of all thought but one—for the knowledge that he was to see Sabine in a few moments absorbed him to the exclusion of everything else.

As he traversed the two great arteries which lay across his way, he heard about him the loud shouting out of news. But he did not slacken his swift pace, and it was by chance that his eye caught the green and yellow placards which told of the actual outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Japan. For one of the few times in his life Domville spoke aloud to himself, "Paul will now have to go!" That was what he heard his voice saying; but the fact which would have meant so much to him that morning now left him unmoved.

At last, when he was striding along Carlos Place, he began to consider, with some dismay, certain prosaic facts which lay right in front of him, or rather, round

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the corner. He reminded himself that at Babbage's he would have to ask for his enemy and kinswoman, the Baroness Karff; that he would have to see her first, —effect with her some kind of reconciliation, before seeing Sabine; the thought for a moment rather dashed Domville's deep instinctive joy, and became very present to him as he caught sight of the group of old-fashioned houses then composing the famous hotel from which Sabine had dated the letter which had so changed the world to him.

The original Babbage's remained for a considerable time the last surviving house of call belonging to a now obsolete type, and till its recent destruction,—one may even say its obliteration,—this old hotel had nothing in common with the vast caravanserais which are so typical an expression of our modern life.

In a dingy, sombre house which formed an annex to the larger building, and which was divided into suites of rooms reserved for those great personages who were regular habitués of the place, many strange poignant dramas had taken place since the day when Babbage's had been founded by an ex-courier of genius who thoroughly understood the tastes of his royal and noble patrons. Here, in addition to many reigning sovereigns, had stayed more than one king in exile, more than one queen consort, who from Babbage's had felt able to dictate terms to a peccant spouse. To the royalties of Europe Babbage's, for nearly a hundred years, represented a half-way house between the dull splendours of courts and the comfort of complete incognito; and in even now not very far-off days the pathetic Early Victorian ugliness of the high dark rooms added to the excitement, the mysterious romance, of a visit to grimy London, and to that still barbarous people, the English!

Sabine's parents had spent a month there during the first year of their marriage, and among the letters she

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so greatly treasured was one beginning: "Beloved Mama, behold I am now writing to you from dear dirty Babbage's!" So when the Baroness Karff and the young lady who was once more passing as her ward returned to England, it was of course to Babbage's that they came. And it was from there that Sabine dated the letter which told Domville that she loved him, and looked for no happier fate than to be his wife.

See Sabine now as she stands waiting for the messenger bearing the missive which the Cardinal has promised to send immediately after his interview with Francis Domville. The Baroness, assailed by a variety of feelings, and having just emerged defeated from what has been the great, the supreme battle of her life, that which had for guerdon the Margravate of Moravia itself, has now broken down; she is really ill and has retired to bed; thus Sabine is alone—alone in the sombre salon of Babbage's Imperial Russian Suite.

She is moving restlessly about, and as she does so she cannot help thinking, with a touch of amazement, of the radiantly happy letters which were, she knows, written in this very room by her young mother twenty-two years ago, and her eyes brim with tears. She tells herself, for the hundredth time since, taking her courage in her hands, she sought out yesterday the Cardinal Archbishop, that she may, in this matter of Francis Domville, have made a terrible mistake. Till she saw the Cardinal,—till she parted with the letter which she wrote immediately on her arrival in London,—she felt as sure of Domville's love as of her own. She understood so well that it was his love as well as his pride which made him refuse the strange scheme of life planned by the Baroness Karff!

But now Sabine is full of doubt; the Cardinal told her kindly but plainly that were he in Domville's place

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he would hesitate—hesitate long before accepting the honour offered to him; for Englishmen, it seems, value their liberty more than they do their love. If the Cardinal is right, if Domville only loved in her the woman he was deceived into believing the Baroness's orphan ward, then she, Sabine, will indeed be twice undone. For she will have to go back,—back to the aunts, the uncles, the cousins, who tell each other everything, and to whom she has been compelled to confide her love,—her intention of marrying out of the caste which is her own, and which she is now so well content to abandon.

Then, while she is telling herself that she is surely the most unhappy, the most humbled, of women, the door opens, and the voice of the maître d'hôtel who is not the least of the cherished institutions of Babbage's, and whose old heart Sabine made glad, when she was last here during those sad days at the end of August, by giving him the Fifth Class of the Moravian Order,—a decoration she now no longer has it in her power to bestow,—announces in his cracked old voice: "The gentleman your Highness is expecting has arrived from Archbishop's House!"

And, now that the moment she has longed for and dreaded has come, Sabine shows the stuff of which she is made. She is glad that Babbage's hotel still remains faithful to the tall wax candles and to the dingy Argand lamps, one of which sheds dim radiance on a far off corner, but the voice in which she says "Thank you, good Barter, I will receive the messenger here," is quite steady, cool to indifference.

Mr. Barter bows and retires, backwards; he is well aware that the lady whose name is put down in the hotel register as the Countess Sabine Reiffersberg is no longer entitled to this peculiar mark of deference, but it is not for him to remind her of her fallen state. And

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in any case it is a delicate tribute to her youth and gracious beauty.

Very slowly therefore the major-domo backs out of the door, and then, effacing himself to allow Francis Domville to pass through, he closes it noiselessly on the Cardinal's messenger, for good Barter prides himself on knowing the world, and he realizes that his Eminence has chosen no common envoy.

Then, as Domville walks hesitatingly forward across the darkened room, he hears a yearning, homing cry of joy, and a moment later Sabine is in his arms—

—There follows for them both a wonderful hour,—an hour in which they seem to make closer acquaintance than in the whole month spent by them together at Gaynesford, an hour which reveals in each hidden treasures of the kind which wise lovers are ever seeking —and finding. When she says a word, a timid, shamefaced word, of gratitude for the sacrifice she has been told he is making for her sake, she learns with exquisite contentment that the Cardinal and the Baroness were quite wrong, for Domville, it seems, does not value his liberty at all,—indeed, the only thing on which he has ever set a price, the only thing that has mattered at all to him since that first magic meeting in the pavilion at Hague House, is—Sabine herself.

Each avoids any reference to that absurd, that preposterous suggestion of the Baroness Karff; in fact, she is but once mentioned, and then only that Sabine may delicately indicate to her lover that "Cooey" does not care for Gaynesford,—that the Surrey air does not suit her. Of course she will come and see them there at least once a year, but she means to retire, à la Maintenon, to the orphanage founded by Sabine's mother, the Archduchess Renier, in Buda Pesth.

And this unimportant confidence apparently lifts a weight from Domville's heart; a brighter, steadier light

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burns in his grey eyes, and he suddenly becomes even more eager than he was before to fix the day, the hour, of that ceremony which is to take place in the chapel of Archbishop's House. Life is so short, love is so long; why should they wait, why allow any delay? And he draws for her a vision of all the happy ghosts of Domville blood who share Gaynesford with himself coming down from Paradise to welcome the loveliest, the purest, the most worshipped, of the many brides who have been brought home to the brave old house.

The fond foolish hour slips by, and now Domville must leave Babbage's,—dear dirty Babbage's,—which is just now his Mecca, his holy of holies. When he comes back, in three hours, it is just possible that Sabine will by then be able to tell him the date which those to whom she still owes obedience will allow her to fix.

When Domville once more found himself in Brook Street, the world had altered for him so much that he scarcely knew where he should go, and what he should do with himself, till there came the happy moment when he had been told he might return to Babbage's.

Suddenly he bethought himself that there was one person to whom he was bound to tell, without the loss of a moment, the wonderful thing which had befallen him,—and that person was not his sister, Anne Leycester, or his cousin Paul Feyghine, but Mary Wratten. He turned his now laggard steps, therefore, towards South Street, and soon, almost too soon, found himself in his aunt's familiar house.

Learning with satisfaction that Madame Feyghine was out, he asked for Miss Wratten, and, as he followed old Gregor up the staircase which led to the room where Mary spent so much of her dull life, he could not but recall, with almost cruel vividness, the last time he had come there especially to seek her out as he was

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now again seeking her, and for an instant that fear that so often accompanies the sudden coming of great good fortune, possessed him and tempered his content. Everything else was just the same, he only had changed.

As he passed through into the room, this impression was deepened. True, Mary was now sitting in the lamplight instead of in the daylight, but, heaped up on the table, just as the P.P.C. cards had been on that fine October afternoon, were packets of small notes, all ready for despatch.

As Francis Domville was shown in, Miss Wratten got up and, with a swift, rather playful movement not quite in keeping with her usual staid manner, she tossed him one of the tiny envelopes which had been a fashion in Madame Feyghine's youth, and to which the old woman still remained faithful. "Take this home with you," she exclaimed, "and it will save a messenger! But don't trouble to read it now, for no verbal answer will meet the case. What the Japanese have done appears to your aunt to be an act of unparalleled treachery, and she is asking practically every Russian of her acquaintance to come and fiercely rejoice with her because the enemy has begun by putting himself so wholly in the wrong!"

"Ah!" said Domville, indifferently, "Aunt Letty is taking it like that, is she? I doubt if Paul will feel the same; but I'll certainly look in for a moment——"

He stopped speaking; now that they were face to face, he found it very difficult to say what he had come to say. He knew Mary Wratten to be kind, but he believed her to be cold; and, above all, he was well aware of that element in her character which made her keenly alive to the ridiculous,—so now he feared lest he should appear absurd in her sight; he had ere this heard her make sport of lovers.

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Then there came a memory of Sabine,—of Sabine as she had looked at him when he first came into the half-darkened room where he had found her alone,—and that vision brought into his face a look which set Mary's heart beating.

They were both now standing facing each other, and she retreated before that intense and glowing look, over to the curtained window. There she stood looking at him, mutely waiting for him to speak, her slender hands clasped together on her breast.

"Mary," he said at last, "do you remember that walk we took together some time ago, this last autumn?" He looked at her rather nervously, but she made no answer; and so he went on, speaking quickly, as if eager to get what he had to say said: "Well, I have come to tell you—no one else knows anything of it as yet—that everything is well with me now! You were right, and I was quite wrong, that day! It all seems too good to be true; in fact I can hardly believe it *is* true,—if I were to tell you what I feel, I'm afraid you'd think me a romantic fool,—but you must not laugh at me, Mary——"

Her hands fell apart, and for a moment she looked fixedly at Domville; then she saw that he was far too completely absorbed in his own feelings to give any thought to hers,—and she thanked God that it was so. To such a nature as Miss Wratten's any touch of humiliation would have been far harder to bear than would be an unsuspected, unrequited affection, however deep, however true.

"No," she said very gently, "I am not likely to do that, Francis, especially as it has proved me, as you say, to have been right. But do tell me more about it,—that is if you don't mind doing so."

She came a little forward, and sat down with her back to the lamp, and then he, still standing, told her

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something of the truth. "I think you will like her," he concluded, "—I do not think, Mary, that you will be able to help liking her."

He half expected her to dash his contentment by some word which would show that she disclaimed the thought of any possible friendship between herself and the lady who had been till so lately Margravine of Moravia, but all she said was, "Am I so very hard to please?"—and even Domville heard the touch of pain in the quiet accents.

He looked at her, rather surprised. "Well, yes, I think you are," he said, smiling. "You would be quite unaffected by the kind of considerations which would move Aunt Letty——"

"Ah! but there you're wrong! I'm more romantic than you take me to be, Francis! I like to think that your lady is a princess,—and of you as the hero of a fairy tale!"

"Ah! now you *are* laughing at me!" he cried, a little vexed.

"I am laughing with you, not at you!"—she smiled, and then got up. "If you don't wish to meet Madame Feyghine, you had better go now. I'm sure you don't want to say anything of all this to her to-day?"

He shook his head quickly. "I'm going to see Anne," he said, "and I hope she'll understand, Mary, as well as you've understood."

The day which is to make or mar a life,—which is to deflect the whole course of a man's or a woman's destiny, dawns on the victim or favourite of fortune like any other day, and very seldom foreshadows what the hours are to bring forth.

To Mrs. Leycester that second Tuesday in February began rather more dully than usual; she had now been waiting on Providence for many many weeks,

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and Providence seemed in no hurry to justify her patience.

Paul Feyghine had kept his word. Since the evening when Anne had made her unsuccessful effort to persuade him to adopt the course advised by both his mother and Francis Domville, he had not been to Sanctuary House excepting once, and then only in company with his cousin. Indeed, he seemed to have now gone out of Anne Leycester's life as completely as during those long months which she now knew had followed his first meeting with Joaquina Nuñez.

Some two hours after Anne had eaten her solitary luncheon, the quiet square outside, the stillness of which she felt to-day to be oppressive, was filled with the scurrying feet, the shouting of newspaper boys; and at first Mrs. Leycester tried to shut her ears to the sound.

In some respects a great city remains very provincial, and in the byways of Westminster the news of a murder in Pimlico is regarded as being of greater interest than that of a world-shaking event which has taken place beyond the confines of the town. But gradually Anne began to distinguish the words, and with a thrill of intense feeling she realized that what was being shouted outside her gate was no local horror, but the news of the Japanese attack on the Russian fleet; and almost at the same moment that Francis Domville had said aloud the words "Now Paul will have to go!" Anne, sitting alone in Sanctuary House, knew that these insistent cries brought her the same message.

She perceived with blinding clearness that this altered everything,—that now Paul must and would go to Russia. He could not stay in England dancing attendance on a light woman while his regiment was already on its way to the front. But with that knowledge came swift resentment against Madame Feyghine; if this was to be the end of it all,—if fate was now to make

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so clean a cut through the tangled skein of Paul's life, then how cruel, how wanton it had been to force her, Anne Leycester, to quarrel with him!

Very soon the loud cries died away. Sanctuary Square and the small surrounding streets took but a tepid interest in the conflict which had just begun in the Far East. Even Mitroff, who lay upstairs, now sick to death, made no sign that the news meant anything to him.

There came a ring at the door. Anne started violently; to her excited fancy it seemed as if someone must be coming with news,—news of Paul. Then half relieved, half disappointed, she saw it was only a letter, written and addressed in Mary Wratten's familiar writing, containing a summons from her aunt. Madame Feyghine was, it seemed, giving a reception that evening, and she was extremely desirous that her niece should be present.

But before Anne had time to make up her mind as to whether she should respond to this unreasonable request, Francis Domville was shown in, and Anne had to put herself aside, and to fill the part—which appertains more to the curious relationship of brother and sister than to any other—of listener, of sympathizer. Even in the midst of her anxiety,—of the sad despondency which filled her heart,—she could not but be deeply amazed, and more than a thought dismayed, by the strange story which her brother now poured into her ears, with so exultant, so triumphant an air.

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CHAPTER XXIX

Vae victis !

As Mrs. Leycester passed through the open door into the glass vestibule which separated the hall of her aunt's house from the street, it struck her that the house wore to-night an almost defiant air of brightness and gaiety ; old Gregor looked taller and more resplendent than usual, but there was an air of profound perplexity and pain on his grey old face, and his long caftan looked dull and shabby against the masses of red and white flowers—the Russian national colours—which now stood banked up in the hall and at intervals up the staircase.

Madame Feyghine, who for years had held out against the illuminant of modern life, had that autumn given way ; so it was perhaps the electric light, which now made bright every cranny of the old-fashioned hall, that gave the house an air of unwonted festivity. The fact that this reception was taking place on that sinister eighth of February which was to live in history as the date of the Japanese attack on Port Arthur was regarded by Mrs. Leycester as a mere coincidence.

Another woman in her position might have drawn down her blinds and denied herself to her friends ; not so Madame Feyghine.

Anne found Gregor waiting at the bottom of the staircase, and, as she came towards him, the old Russian

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servant's face assumed an eager expression; Anne intuitively felt that he was dumbly entreating something from her, a word of sympathy, perhaps, for the inauspicious beginning of this great war.

"I fear, Gregor, that you feel sad to-day," she said kindly, "you must long to be in your own country on such a day as this." Gregor bent his head gravely, then he said rather mysteriously, "My master, Paul Nicolaievitch, is upstairs to-night."

Mrs. Leycester drew back; her face first paled and then flushed. Paul upstairs, receiving his mother's guests; what did that portend?—During the last few weeks, the son of the house, for once heedless of his mother's wishes, had absented himself from Madame Feyghine's weekly receptions, and the news that he was here made Anne Leycester for a moment inclined to go home again.

To meet him here to-night, among a crowd of people, would be intolerable to her; she knew that he would drift towards her, as he always did when they found themselves in the same room,—they would exchange a few unsatisfying sentences, and then, probably at the sharp order of his mother, move apart. Yet, even as she stood irresolutely hesitating as to what she should do, Anne knew that she would stay,—nay, that it would now be agony to her to leave this house without seeing Paul; she knew that she longed with a painful longing to see him again,—to try and guess from his face how things were with him.

She turned, and, making a sign to the old manservant not to precede her, she began slowly ascending the staircase. Half-way up she stopped abruptly and, putting out her hand, grasped the banisters. Paul Feyghine, as yet unaware of her approach, stood on the landing, an air of endurance and watchfulness on his tired, haggard face; and again Anne asked herself what

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special reason had brought him here to-night. Had it been a more than usually sharp word of command from his mother, anxious that they should now present a united front? Or was it possible that he had come here to-night to meet her,—to say the words which should make them friends once more?

When Paul became aware of his cousin's presence, his face softened and his eyes lost something of their suffering, preoccupied look; he grasped her hand warmly; and, as he muttered a word of welcome, Anne with secret amazement saw that he had forgotten their last meeting,—their bitter words at parting.

She had the sensation, as they stood there face to face in the little lobby within hearing of several of Madame Feyghine's guests, that he was wordlessly asking something of her, begging mutely for sympathy and help from the human being who had only failed him once; and, as she passed on, she heard his voice behind her saying: "I want to speak to you presently; may I do so?" Anne turned her head, and looked at him rather piteously; if he wished to speak to her, why did he not come to see her?—why had he waited till to-night?

As she went on and found herself in the room she knew so well, and where she had spent of late years so many evenings, Anne was seized with an extraordinary feeling of being in a strange place, and among people unknown to her. True, Madame Feyghine,—dressed with far more regard to her age and rank than was usually the case, and wearing the poppy-red ribbon of St. Catharine, from which was suspended the cross of the Order, inscribed in letters of silver with the Russian motto "For Love and Fatherland,"—stood, the centre of an animated group; true, Mary Wratten, her clever, rather mocking face half hidden by the samovar behind which she was sitting, was in her usual place; but

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Madame Feyghine's habitués, the familiar friends who came week by week and year by year, were almost all absent, indeed conspicuously absent, to-night. Some, no doubt, had abstained from coming because it seemed to them most unlikely that their old friend would give her usual reception on the evening of a day which had proved so disastrous to her adopted country; others had stayed away from a certain delicacy, a certain awkwardness of feeling. Those of them there who belonged to the usual group represented the least pleasant element in the circle; for it was clear that they had come to-night to see how Madame Feyghine and her son would bear themselves, now that what Paul had declared to be impossible, had actually come to pass.

The place of the English friends and connections, of whose absence Anne was so vividly aware, was filled to-night by a crowd of foreigners, including some French diplomatists and their wives, excellent folk whom, as a rule, Madame Feyghine affected to despise, for by birth they belonged to the Republican *bourgeoisie*, a world of which she knew nothing, for all her French sympathies were Legitimist. There were also present certain members of the Russian colony in London,—people who were bidden once or twice a year to large afternoon crushes given specially for them and their like. They were not people Madame Feyghine would ever have admitted to her intimate circle, and, sad as many of them felt to-night, they enjoyed being included in this evening's invitation, and they hovered round their hostess with eager deference.

Strangest of all to Anne Leycester was a small group of English people, singular just now as being pro-Russian in sympathy; some of these, like Madame Feyghine herself, had family connections in Russia,—others had lived there,—a certain number, and among them Mrs. Leycester with surprise recognized to-

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night Jack Barton and his bride, were in important and amicable business relations with the Russian Government.

As Anne made her way across the room to where Mary Wratten was sitting, she heard clearly what Madame Feyghine was saying to a number of Frenchmen standing about her; the old lady's voice, harsh yet melodious and piercingly clear, was slightly raised, and she spoke in English.

"Yes, it is, as you say, Monsieur Bertin, very much what Bismarck did in '70. But his, after all, was civilized treachery; he so managed affairs that France bore the brunt of the blame for years——"

"—Exactly thirty years," commented the Frenchman to whom she was speaking.

"—Yes! Yes! No doubt all that juggling with the Ems telegram was infamous! But here we have the stupid, brutal treachery of the savage! However, there is always a to-morrow."

"Certainly," assented the diplomatist, very gravely; "there is always a to-morrow, and also, Madame, there is the day after to-morrow,—the day of reckoning."

Anne hurried on, and sat down by her friend with a feeling of relief. Miss Wratten was surveying the low table spread out in front of her with a humorous dismay; very little was left of the cakes, the Siberian raspberries, the various delicacies which, on ordinary Tuesdays, were left practically untouched by Madame Feyghine's usual circle of friends and relations. She was beginning to think it was high time to ring for further supplies of plain bread and butter.

"I suppose all these people were specially invited to come to-night?" said Anne in a low voice.

Mary smiled: "Yes, just as you were! I wrote fifty-seven notes! Of course a few kind friends have looked

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in to see how we are taking our reverses; and we sent to a few others asking them not to come, for we knew they would exult, and we were determined not to give them the opportunity of exulting here. Last Tuesday we went rather too far, we nearly came to an open fight—to actual blows; the Russians present were quite scandalized; but to-night, as you see, Anne, we have Paul to keep order."

"And is my aunt still thinking of going to Russia?"

Miss Wratten's face suddenly became very grave: "She has not spoken of it lately; but I suppose *now* Paul will have to go."

Anne bent her head. Oh! yes, now Paul would have to go,—there was a certain sore satisfaction in the thought.

"Do you know of what to-night reminds me?" Miss Wratten spoke in a tone of determined lightness. "Our party seems to me to be absolutely on all fours with an informal reception given at the German Embassy a day or two after the Kruger telegram. We went there, I fear, just as some of the people have come here to-night,—not altogether animated by the kindest intentions. Oddly enough, Anne, a good many of those who are round us now, were there that night."

Someone came up and asked Miss Wratten for a cup of tea; and when she again turned to the woman sitting by her side, a singular change had come over her face, it was suffused with a radiance which for a moment made her beautiful. "Anne," she said in a low, even voice, "I wish to tell you that I know about Francis; and that I am very, very glad."

Anne Leycester looked at her dumbly. The thought of Mary Wratten had been one of many contributories to her feeling of anxiety and doubt concerning the amazing news her brother had told her that morning,—and yet—yet Mary seemed wholly satisfied. "I

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suppose," she said slowly, "that he came straight to you, after having been with me."

"Yes, by great good fortune Madame Feyghine was out driving,—actually delivering her notes of invitation in person!" Mary Wratten hesitated, then said quickly, "He was not here ten minutes,—he was on his way from Babbage's."

"I am to see her to-morrow," said Anne with a certain effort. She added, "I suppose I ought to be glad."

"And she's a real queen, not a mere Anne Bullen!" Mary Wratten spoke with a touch of whimsical pride in the modern Francis Domville's achievement.

"A queen no longer," said Anne rather sharply.

"Well, that, surely, is not to be regretted!" Something in Mary's tone struck Anne's sensitive ear. "Francis has told her everything," she said to herself with a certain wonder,—"everything that he hid from me. I hope," she said aloud, "that he has written to Aunt Letty. It would be really dreadful if she were to hear of it from anyone else!"

"I understand," Mary spoke very gravely, "that so far it's an absolute secret; in fact that only you and I and the Cardinal know anything about it. You see, it was only really settled yesterday. This war will fill everyone's mind, for a while at least, to the exclusion of everything else, so there's not likely to be much gossip about what is, after all, only the affair of the two——" she stopped abruptly.

Rose Barton, the exact tint of her sunny hair reflected in the broad, gold waistband which had been a much-discussed item of her wedding gown, floated towards them; her eyes were sparkling, her face full of a mischievous, impish glee. With the complete naturalness of gesture which was one of her greatest physical charms, she slipped down under the table upon which

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stood the samovar, and a moment later was kneeling between the two women.

"Aren't you glad *now* that your brother despised poor little me?" she asked, and then gazed with her bright, shadowless eyes into Anne's dismayed face; they hardly noticed that Mary Wratten had quietly risen and walked across the room to where one of Madame Feyghine's less important guests was standing disconsolate.

"What do you mean, Rose? Or do you mean anything?"—Anne Leycester's tone changed the other's teasing mood into something graver and more worthy.

"Then you *do* know?" she cried,—"then I may congratulate you? I expect I know a great deal more about her than you do, for I have made it my business to find out. She's beautiful—but of course he's told you that; she adores him so that she nearly pined to death for him—now I wonder if he told you *that!* Of course you know all about their first meeting; it was extremely romantic! She took Gaynesford for a few weeks this last summer, and there met him, and fell in love at first sight. But she was then—" Rose's voice lowered—"a widow bewitched."

"A widow bewitched?" repeated Anne, "what do you mean, Rose, by that?"

"Oh, well, a widow bewitched is a woman,"—Rose had the grace to blush,—"who's neither married nor single! That's why the Margravine, when she first met Mr. Domville, was so unhappy, but now, it seems, the Pope's made her single again, so it's all right! I suppose it's still a secret?"

"Very much a secret," said Anne gravely; "would you mind telling me who told you?"

"You yourself told me," replied Mrs. Barton with a slight grimace, "a few moments ago! I didn't know till then—I only had reason to suspect something of the kind! But really I knew it was only a question of

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time. The people about me," she looked deprecatingly at Anne Leycester, "have always thought that I could never keep a secret. Now I have known this secret—and confess that it really is a most exciting and extraordinary secret—for nearly a fortnight, in fact for rather longer!"

She waited a moment to allow this almost incredible fact to sink into her listener's mind. "The day after we came back from our honeymoon," she continued, "my father-in-law sent for me,—in the end he came to see me, after having written to prepare me for some portentous communication. It then came out,—please don't be *too* angry, Mrs. Leycester,—that he had been asked to find out about your brother—what sort of man he was and so on." Anne winced, but the other rattled on:

"He said to me,"— she slightly mimicked old Sir Henry Barton's pompous, deliberate manner,—"'I wish to ask you, my dear Rose, a very important question: have you ever come across a Mr. Francis Domville? At first he wouldn't tell me why he wanted to know, but of course I soon got it out of him. . . . But now I must tell you what happened next, for it's really rather funny! Jack's father swore me to the greatest secrecy, and assured me that the investigation—as he called it—had been confided to him alone. Well, the very next day my own father sent for me; he didn't go so far as to ask me if I had ever met Mr. Francis Domville, but he asked me to tell him quite honestly what I really thought of your brother. I may say," added Rose pensively, "that for the first time in my life I understood why people think my father such a clever man; for—well, I had to confess to him that the *real* reason why I was Mrs. Barton instead of Mrs. Domville was that your brother hadn't liked me well enough! You see, I gave Mr. Domville such a splendid character that father couldn't make out why, if I thought all that good

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of him, I hadn't made a point of securing him for myself—instead of leaving him to be swept up by an archduchess! Ever since then—it's a whole fortnight, remember—I've been waiting and watching. I did meet your brother about a week ago, and I tried to give him a hint, but he wouldn't take it; he didn't understand at all,—and now I don't suppose he will ever know what a good friend I've been to him!"

Anne had listened, not impatiently, but without really hearing the last half of the torrent of eager words poured into her ear. Her brother and his affairs had become, during the last few moments, exceedingly remote, for Paul Feyghine was looking at her, reminding her wordlessly that he wished to have speech with her. She was conscious of acute relief when Rose Barton at last left off speaking, but even so she felt she must say that which would shield Francis from vulgar gossip.

"But I know that we can trust you," she said earnestly. "It *is* a secret; and when the actual fact of the engagement becomes public, I am sure, Rose, that you realize as well as I do how much my brother would dislike any talk, any——"

Rose seized Mrs. Leycester's hand and pressed it impulsively: "Indeed, I do understand,—and I won't say a word! I promise you no one shall hear anything of what I've just told you!"

Madame Feyghine was now sitting in the middle of the room. Someone had drawn forward the high-backed chair on which she usually sat, and, though holding herself quite upright, she looked tired, old and worn. Anne Leycester noticed that she received with ill-disguised impatience the wordy adieux of her guests, as they came up, one after the other, to say good-night, and to tell her how delightful and exhilarating had been the evening passed in her presence. Very different this

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from the practice of those who usually attended her Tuesday receptions; they had been wont to shed off discreetly, imperceptibly, one by one, till their hostess and Mary Wratten were left alone.

Paul was busily engaged in acting as his mother's vice-regent,—speeding the parting guest, meeting compliment with compliment, parrying indiscreet questions put to him by some who regarded the Feyghines as being much in the confidence of those who then guided the destinies of Russia. The sound of his deep voice, speaking first in one foreign tongue and then in another, smote painfully on Mrs. Leycester's ear. It seemed hopeless to try and speak to him, and yet she lingered on; if he had anything to say of any real moment, he would surely make an opportunity.

At last everyone had gone but they two; and both, from different angles of the room, approached the mistress of the house together. Paul bent before his mother, and kissed her hand; he was evidently going away at once. Madame Feyghine looked up at him sharply: "There's Anne," she said in her harsh voice, "if you are going straight back to your rooms, you had better escort your cousin home." Anne felt that her aunt's penetrating glance was turned, first on herself, and then on Paul. Madame Feyghine had never asked her niece what had been the upshot—if any—of her conversation with Paul a fortnight ago. Was it possible that she was now creating an opportunity? Oh! no, everything was changed to-day,—Paul was doubtless starting for Russia to-morrow.

"—I was about to ask Anne if I might take her home," he said at last; and then they left the room together, Madame Feyghine flinging a last unpleasant word at her niece: "I asked your brother to come to-night, but doubtless he is more agreeably occupied elsewhere,—perhaps celebrating this abominable treachery!"

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CHAPTER XXX

"Charon, one favour do I ask of thee—
Ferrying my love o'er Styx, take also me."
"Not so; my boat needs ballast: thou and she
Together too light-hearted far would be."

AFTER Anne Leycester had been put into the hansom by her cousin, she heard him give the driver some rather long directions, of which there only reached her the final words—"Drive slowly."

A few moments later they were sitting side by side, driving, as Feyghine had ordered, very slowly, down Park Street,—the window up, the cold wind stinging their faces.

One by one the long minutes went by, and neither of them spoke. Anne was thinking with poignant sadness of the last time they had been thus seated side by side; when he had been driving her home from Islington to Westminster, in the bright sunlight of an early July morning. She now longed painfully to hear him say something to break down the barrier which had risen between them—something, for instance, about the child; as regarded Nicolette she surely had a right to his confidence.

She turned her head at last and looked at him with a perplexed, inquiring gaze, made possible by the dim light, which occasionally brightened into sudden clearness owing to some gleam striking from one of the houses they were passing.

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Feyghine was leaning back in an attitude with which she was familiar, his arms crossed, his head sunk rather forward on his breast; and as Anne looked at him, with close, not altogether kindly, scrutiny, she realized that mentally he was far from her,—in some place whither she could not follow him. Deliberately she set her mind to read his face; and that instinct,—that power of seeing what was passing, even as it were "in a glass darkly," in those whose secret thoughts she wished to probe,—told Anne Leycester that a struggle was even now going on in Paul's mind; she felt that he was torn with painful indecision, fighting with some invisible foe dwelling within his breast.

At last she withdrew her gaze from his face; there was something terrible to her in his sorrow-stricken eyes, and yet what she now divined of the secret warfare waging within him angered and repelled her. Anne's own people, the Domvilles of old days, had ever been fighters; ready, and even eager, to take service abroad at a time when their own country had no use for them as fighting men. There had been Domvilles in every foreign legion; a Domville had distinguished himself in the Berwick Brigade, and several of Anne's nearest kindred had been Papal Zouaves.

To-night, sitting by the side of a man who she believed was about to start, albeit reluctantly, for the war which had begun in so dramatic and unexpected a fashion that very day, Mrs. Leycester told herself, with something like scorn, that ever since the world began, men have left the women they loved and gone into battle; the modern world—to Anne's thinking so sordid and materialistic—has, in this one matter, held true to the old high ideal. Three years ago—or was it four?—Englishmen who had everything the world could give them had gone out to fight, and their women had bidden them God-speed with a high heart. To what confidences

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had Anne Leycester not listened,—with what repressed agonies had she not sympathized,—what hidden griefs had she not tried to assuage, during the long ordeal her own country had just gone through!

The cab was now driving down the sharp descent into Piccadilly, and the horse, uneasy at being made to go so slowly, slipped and stumbled. Feyghine started, he turned half round, and with a quick gesture put his arm across the top of the closed flaps of the cab; as he did so, his cousin shrank back from the living barrier placed between herself and possible danger, but he remained unconscious of the movement she had made.

Had a lantern been turned upon them at that moment, it would have appeared as if the man sitting there had thrust out his arm with the desire of encircling,—of bringing closer to himself, the woman sitting by his side. But she, looking at him steadily, knew only too well that it was not so; and the knowledge that Paul was so deeply absorbed in his own thoughts as to be scarcely aware of her presence, filled Anne with unreasoning pain and anger.

Anne Leycester no longer thought, as she had once thought, that she and the woman whom she now knew to be Joaquina the dancer shared, as it were, Paul Feyghine between them; she absorbing the higher, and the other woman the lower, side of his nature; she absorbing the gold and Joaquina the dross. But, till to-night, Anne had known her relation to her cousin to be, if peculiar and spiritual in its essence, one which he greatly valued, and which was something very different from the warm, brotherly tie binding him to Anne's brother, Francis Domville. She had been, if not satisfied, then perforce content, to know how much she counted in his life; and now the knowledge that she was quite shut out from his confidence, that he had

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found it possible to live without her sympathy, brought with it, especially to-night, intolerable pain.

Suddenly she saw that Feyghine was about to break the long, the unnatural silence between them. He opened his lips, and then: "You are such an angel of goodness, Anne. You are so full of unending charity to those who are weak,—to those who—who fall——"

He stopped short, and, with an intuition born of jealousy, Anne Leycester told herself that he had rehearsed the few words which had just fallen on her ear, and that he was now trying to remember how else he desired to frame what he was about to say. Was it possible, was it conceivable, that he had made up his mind not to go to Russia, but to act the one part all men dread to act,—that of the man afraid?

Anne sat up and leant forward, and for a brief moment the bar made by Feyghine's arm pressed against her. She drew back, with an almost violent movement of repugnance, of which, this time, Paul became aware; he looked at her and was startled by the face she turned up towards his, for it bore an expression with which he was not familiar.

"No, Paul," she said, steadily, deliberately; "I am not so full of charity as you seem to believe. It's easy to sympathize with those who stand as wholly outside one's own life as do the people who come to me for help and sympathy; but,—believe me,—it is less easy, nay it is impossible, to feel such charity when"—she hesitated, then went on ruthlessly—"when, the woman who is weak, or the man who confesses himself a coward, is of one's own blood."

Their eyes met, and hers wavered and then fell; she even hoped for a brief moment that he would miss the significance of her words. But his face changed; she saw that he understood. Ah! at last she had stirred him!—at last he no longer looked at her as at a living

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Beatitude, but recognized in her a woman of flesh and blood, who could strike,—and striking, wound.

He withdrew his arm and flung the cab doors open; then stood up, and gave the driver a brief order: "To Sanctuary House. Drive quickly." As he sat down again by her side, Mrs. Leycester ventured to look at her companion, and she saw that anger reigned in his eyes instead of sorrow,—honest anger at the insult she had just flung at him.

Their cab was now making its way with extraordinary quickness through the still heavy traffic, and Anne felt as if she herself were being driven on,—carried out on a swift current of emotion into a region of feeling hitherto never actually entered by herself; she looked down at her hands,—they were trembling, and with a passionate movement she pressed them together.

Suddenly they sped from the region of loud sounds into stillness,—from the sight of many bright gleaming lights into comparative darkness; they had left the streets behind them, and were driving down Constitution Hill. In another moment the cab would be flying through St. James's Park; then threading its way through a mass of narrow streets, and so on to the gates of Sanctuary House. . . .

There Paul Feyghine would leave her—leave her perhaps for ever, and the pride and jealousy to which she had given free rein melted, fused in a great longing for reconciliation. She touched his arm: "Paul," she said, in a low beseeching voice, "forgive me! I am ashamed of what I said, I know that you are not a coward."

He turned on her sternly: "Yes," he said, "in the sense you mean, Anne, I am a coward. You, of course, guess that I am staying on here in London,—that I am not going to Russia, and I am staying, as you also probably suspect, because of that woman,—the woman whose name has never been directly mentioned between

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us, who formed the subject of our discussion — our quarrel some weeks ago. I have no doubt that my mother has spoken evil of her,—perhaps even Francis, your brother,"—and then, as Mrs. Leycester made a quick gesture of dissent, his face for the first time softened: "Well, I'm glad of that, for she has never injured him in any way."

Again he became silent, and again Anne felt that she must speak. "Remember that I know nothing of her," she said slowly, "except that she is the mother of your child, Paul. Does she really wish you to stay with her; does she understand the gravity of what you will be doing for"—Anne grew very white in the dim light—"for her sake?"

He turned to her rather fiercely: "I will tell you—I wish that you, Anne, at least, should know the truth. I have not told my mother; why should that which is agony to me be joy to her? The woman of whom you say you know so little, the mother, as you say, of Nicolette, is dying"—and then, as Anne uttered an involuntary expression of amazement and concern, he added quickly, "At least I'm told she's dying! I don't think it's true—I think it's as little true as it was of the child. But if I were to leave her now, as you all wish me to do, and as I suppose I ought to do, she will die. This is no fancy of mine,"—he spoke with a certain excitement. "She is told that she must eat—she will only take food from my hand; they all say that she must have air—even now, as we are sitting here, with the wind of God blowing on us, every window of the house where she is lying is tightly closed. She is surrounded by foolish, ignorant people, who have neither power nor authority over her."

"As it was of the child"— Mrs. Leycester suddenly saw what the words with which Feyghine had broken

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his long silence really signified. "You are such an angel of goodness, Anne. You are so full of unending charity to those who are weak,—to those who—who fall ——" He did not crave her charity for himself, but for a woman who was dying.

This, then, was why he had gone to-night to his mother's house,—that he might appeal to Anne Leycester, to his one close friend and kinswoman. He had nerved himself to ask her to come and do for Joaquina what she had done for Nicolette, and she had repulsed him, and that most cruelly.

Anne knew herself to be no angel, but a very human woman, filled with the feelings and instincts, with the passions which afflict and dominate human nature,—indeed, so afflicted and dominated by those passions had she been, at the very moment when Paul had uttered his appeal, that her usual intuitive vision had deserted her, and she had actually misunderstood and misinterpreted his pitiful words. Nay more, the struggle she had divined to be filling his mind to the exclusion of all thought of her, had really closely concerned her, for he had been trying to justify the request he was about to make. He had been telling himself that to a saint all places are clean, and that an angel's wings are never smirched. For her part, Anne determined, with sad humility, that, though neither saint nor angel, she could and would in this matter live up to Paul's ideal; again she touched his arm: "I will come with you, Paul, to-night; I will come to her as I came to the child."

Feyghine muttered words of broken awkward gratitude, and then he made a quick movement, and Anne heard the signal to the driver, twice repeated, of which she had been told by Madame Feyghine. The cab turned sharply round,—in a moment they were driving up Great George Street, and Big Ben, shining down at them, marked the hour, ten minutes from midnight.

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The sudden signal and the driver's instant response seemed strangely to confirm the whole story she had been made to hear, and of which she to-night seemed even more vividly aware than at the time it had been told to her.

Making a supreme effort over herself, Anne tried to forget, and nearly succeeded, all that which had been so pitilessly told her by Paul's mother,—of Paul's love, and of Paul's weakness. She made a valiant attempt to place herself on that spiritual plane to which she had so often attained during the period of her life when she had been closely associated with the Soul Healers; that is, she tried to see in Joaquina, in the woman to whose side she was now hastening, only a human being in pain and danger,—one who, if now permitted to live on, might in time become more worthy than she had been, if Madame Feyghine could be believed, in the past.

Had Paul not been sitting by Anne's side, she might have been able to banish from her memory his share in Joaquina's life; but in a very few moments her cousin, at last flinging away the restraint which had hitherto oppressed him, began a conversation lasting intermittently the whole of the long drive which now recalled so vividly to them both, but especially to Mrs. Leycester, that which had taken place on the night of the fête at Hague House.

Although almost every word he spoke brought with it sharp pain to his companion, she listened with intense eagerness and growing sympathy. To Anne Leycester all human misery was articulate and cried aloud for succour.

From Paul's words she gradually gathered what had been the history of the last few months, and why he was now a member of that small, disciplined army of watchers, forming a very real part of the world in which we live, whose whole thoughts are centred in a sick

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room. He told her of the desperate fight,—and, as he told it, it seemed a very fine and moving thing,—made by the dancer against creeping ill-health. Anne learnt of the first consultation, that interview with the famous doctor, and of the neglect of his advice; she listened silently while Paul explained the difficulties he had experienced in persuading Señora Nuñez — he never once, to Anne, called the dancer by the Christian name she had made so famous—to give up, even for a short time, the pursuit of her art.

Paul also told that which made clear Madame Feyghine's statement as to the dancer's strange sudden retirement from the stage,—namely, Joaquina's fierce stipulation that her temporary disappearance should not be allowed to become connected, in the mind of the public, with any whisper of illness.

"Every day," said Paul, with a smile more heart-rending than a sob would have been, "I, and a worthy creature, a man to whom she is attached, write out little notices concerning her future plans, and the wonderful new effects she is preparing in view of the ballets which are being specially written for her. The papers are very kind in putting the notices in, and they give her great pleasure—they are the only things she ever reads."

"She is in the room," he went on, rather nervously, "where you saw Nicolette. It is the highest and airiest in the house, and, by Sir Thomas Day's wish, she was moved up there as soon as she became really ill. Unfortunately, she is a bad patient; we are told that she must have air; that she should live—even in the winter—practically out of doors; but she loves warmth, and, when I am not with her, there is no one strong enough to withstand her. But we are able to give her more air than she knows, for there is a little room, almost all window, opening out of the larger one."

"Yes," said Anne, "I remember that little room very

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well." Closing her eyes for a moment, she saw the double aperture, the space from which the door had been lifted, and within it the broad window, wide open to the summer sky; through that window had filtered the shaft of sunlight in which had stood the graceful figure she had taken for a merry ghost dancing down the ages from out a mediæval pageant. . . .

With a sense of oppression and bewilderment, she came back to what Paul was saying; he had lowered his voice and spoke humbly and anxiously. "You won't expect to find Señora Nuñez like the people about you,"—and, as she made a quick protesting gesture, he added quickly, "I don't mean your friends, Anne; I mean those to whom you have come in the past, as you are coming to her now."

"Tell me, Paul, is she a Catholic?" Anne asked the sudden question with a certain gravity. Feyghine shrugged his shoulders; the intense dislike, prejudice, jealousy,—call it what you will,—of the Greek Orthodox for the Catholic Church was plainly visible in the answer which he strove to make indifferent. "Yes,—at least I suppose she is a Catholic. All Spaniards are—since the Inquisition. I have never discussed the subject of religion with her. The old Spanish woman, Nicolette's nurse, is by way of being pious, at least I know she often goes to church. But why do you ask, Anne?" he spoke with sudden, sharp suspicion.

"Because," she answered him, with evident reluctance, "Catholics, I know, do not hold with what you have asked me to do."

"But what Catholics feel concerning this question is nothing to you and to me," he said sternly, "and less than nothing to Señora Nuñez. Whatever she may have been as a child, she certainly has now no religious prejudices. Still, pray believe me when I say that she is naturally good," he urged wistfully. "She has a

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very kind heart; I could tell you things that would touch you. For instance, since she has been ill and away from the theatre, one of the chorus girls broke her leg and Señora Nuñez at once asked me to send the poor girl money. The comedians are all so fond of her; every day someone comes from the theatre to see her or to inquire after her. Indeed, the difficulty is to keep her as quiet as the doctor says she ought to be kept"—Feyghine instinctively refrained from revealing how very ill he knew the dancer to be.

"Does she expect me?" asked Anne in a low voice. "Has she any idea that I am coming to see her to-night?"

Feyghine had been dreading the question: "Yes," he said, "that is, she knew that I meant to ask you to come to-night, but she does not know who you are. She regards you"—he hesitated, seeking for an inoffensive word which should convey the truth.

"—As a Healer," said Anne quietly. "I quite understand. She saw me in the room of the child; we did not speak, but I know that she saw me. Tell me how it is, Paul, if she has been ill so long, that you did not ask me to come long ago,—I mean before to-night?"

"When Nicolette was ill," he said, staring out, and avoiding Mrs. Leycester's eyes, "Señora Nuñez went to see a fortune-teller in whom she and her friends at the theatre have great faith. This woman told her that the child would not die, and that she would be cured by one who would come twice to the Tower, bringing the first time life,—and the second time death. What is really singular, Anne, is that this crystal-gazer, for so I believe she calls herself, described you, and the dress that you would wear when you came—by the way, are you not wearing that same dress now, to-night?"

"Yes," said Anne slowly—what she had just heard vaguely troubled and repelled her,—"but if she believes

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this horrible idea, why is she willing to see me now?"

"She saw the fortune-teller again yesterday," answered Feyghine briefly, "and the woman ate her words."

There was a pause, and then, as if impelled to tell the whole truth, he exclaimed, "I don't wish to deceive you, Anne,—I saw the woman first, and arranged that she should undo the mischief she had done! I don't know what other lie she told, but, whereas before yesterday Señora Nuñez had a nervous dread of your coming to her as you came to the child, she is now eager to see you, and has great faith in your—your gift."

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CHAPTER XXXI

"I too have passed through wintry terrors."

IT is only the highly civilized, and those whose refinement is natural rather than acquired, who surround the great mysteries of birth and death with quietude and dignity. Joaquina, and those whom she recognized as her fellows, were wholly natural,—primitive in the expression of their emotions, and unrestrained in their method of showing joy or grief.

So it was that movement and excitement reigned in the building where the dancer lay ill. As the hansom turned at last into the short thoroughfare facing the Tower, Anne Leycester saw that all the five windows in the gabled whitewashed annexe were lit up. Dimly outlined in the darkness, forming a huge impenetrable mass reared up against the winter sky, stood the Tower. Suddenly a narrow aperture flamed into light; someone had been standing there high up, watching for their coming. A moment later Anne Leycester saw the light go out,—the person who had been waiting up there had seen them coming, and was now hastening swiftly down to meet them at the door.

Before Feyghine had time to place the key in the lock, the heavy nail-studded door was opened from the inside,—there came a murmur of loud, confused chattering from the left, where were the servants' quarters, and, to Anne's amazement and discomfiture, her brother, Francis Domville, stood before her in the little hall she

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remembered so well. This, then, was the "elsewhere" where Madame Feyghine had believed him to be more agreeably occupied than if he had been at her reception!

Domville looked at his sister with an air of deep displeasure and surprise. "You here, Anne?" he asked in a low voice, as if doubtful of the evidence afforded by his own eyes,—and then, as Feyghine left them, and while they could still hear his steps echoing up the turning Tower stairs, he exclaimed, "This is no place for you. How could Paul dream of bringing you here?"

"I offered to come," she said in a constrained voice, but she felt keenly distressed, unable to meet her brother's look of perplexity and anger.

"Then is it possible that you are the person whom that poor, unhappy woman believes is coming to cure her?"—and, as he read the answer in Anne's eyes, he added abruptly, "But she is dying,—Day, who was here a few hours ago, doubted if she would live through to-morrow. Nothing can save her now,—nothing but a miracle." His voice sank into a whisper, so low that his sister could scarcely catch the words: "I beg you, Anne, to let me take you home at once. You can do no good; I feel sure you do not know, Paul cannot have told you, the truth——"

Anne put up her hand with a warning gesture, but the sounds she had thought to be their cousin's returning footsteps died away: "I do know the truth,—nothing has been concealed from me." Then she added, rather bitterly, "Surely it is not for you, Francis, who are a Catholic, to deny the possibility of a miracle?"

This was the first time in their joint lives that Anne had ever spoken to her brother of their difference of religion. It had been a fact, accepted by both as inevitable, creating a barrier between them, and one which neither tried to bridge. Domville raised his eyes, and looked at his sister with a very singular expression.

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"I do not deny," he said slowly, "the possibility of a miracle. But I also believe, what you perhaps do not believe,—that is, in the very active power of the devil. What if I think that this woman should be allowed to die? What if I have cause to know that her living on will irreparably injure Paul? And then,—listen, Anne, as you know, we have never before spoken of these matters,—I will tell you what your coming here to-night makes, at any rate for the moment, impossible. That poor old Spanish woman,—Joaquina's mother, for all I know; I have often suspected it,—has been begging me to fetch a priest. Even Benedict Stone——" then he stopped, vexed with himself for having brought another name into the discussion.

"Benedict Stone?" repeated Anne, astonished, for the name was in some way associated with her childhood.

"Yes," said Domville impatiently, "don't you remember Benedict Stone? A Stonyhurst boy who once came and stayed a week at Gaynesford; he had an extraordinary power over animals; when he whistled all the birds would come and perch on him. But that's neither here nor there! Stone is one of Joaquina's friends,—one of her hangers-on,—one of the many men she has, to my thinking, irreparably injured. I don't suppose he's been in a church for years; but still, he to-night spoke to me, urged me to send for a priest; he said that two days ago Joaquina was quite willing,—nay eager, to see one. I've even had a scene with Paul about it, and I fully intended to fetch a priest as soon as he came back."

There echoed the sound of heavy steps down the tower stairs. "I have promised Paul," she whispered, "and I cannot go away now. I did not know, how could I tell, that she was Catholic?"—and then, looking round, they both saw Feyghine; he appeared eager, hopeful, excited, but he avoided Domville's eyes as he said

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hastily, "Will you come up now, Anne? She is waiting for you. She is quite alone, and she seems better Come!" With a pleading look at her brother, Mrs. Leycester turned and followed Feyghine.

How strangely different was this from her first progress up the tower! Then, her present companion had kept close to her side, talking to her in a nervous, unnatural fashion, making conversation, telling her many things which she had no desire to hear concerning the strange place in which they found themselves. Tonight, he was hurrying on in front of her,—saying nothing, never looking back, and going so quickly that she found it difficult to keep up with him. How far it seemed, much further than the last time, and how tired, how exhausted, she felt, as they went on, ever higher, without reaching their goal!

At last Paul stopped abruptly, and Anne saw that they were opposite the deep embrasure, cut in the hugely thick walls of the tower, which she remembered. Feyghine turned, and taking a step forward stood on the threshold of the door. He and Anne faced one another, and for a moment he seemed as if about to bar her entrance to the room lying beyond. The oil lamp hanging above the door lit up his face, and so strange, so agonized was his look, that Mrs. Leycester, a brave woman, felt fear. "Oh, Paul!" she cried unsteadily, "do not look at me like that! Is there anything I ought to know that you have not told me?"

His face became suddenly convulsed with conflicting emotions: "Will you ask her,—make her tell you,—if the child, Nicolette, is truly mine?" he said,—then opened the door giving into the panelled room, and, standing aside, waited while she, perforce touching him as she passed, went through. She heard the door shutting behind her, and then the sound of Feyghine's footsteps going down, down, down.

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Anne Leycester, standing just inside the room which she remembered so clearly, felt it almost impossible to believe that the place in which she now found herself was that in which she had spent the night with Nicolette and Nurse Beach.

Bright yellow silk draperies covered the greater part of the oak-panelled walls, and hung in front of the aperture leading into the small narrow room which lay off that in which she stood. The oak flooring was concealed by a white felt carpet, on which lay brightly tinted rugs; the room looked smaller than she remembered it,—that, doubtless, because much space was taken up by the large, low, almost square bed, of which the carved wood canopy, supported by slender fluted columns, was lined with blue silk.

Far back in the bed, sitting up supported by banked pillows, with her small, thin face, out of which all the rounded beauty had gone, resting on her hand, Joaquina the dancer looked eagerly at her visitor, and impatiently beckoned to her to come nearer.

As if drawn forward against her will, Anne Leycester slowly advanced, and, as she stood at the bottom of the bed,—as her eyes became fixed on the slight sinuous figure, of which the upper part was clad in a gaily embroidered green jacket, she shivered slightly, for it seemed to her that they two were not alone,—she felt the nearness of another, if invisible, presence.

She looked away from the bed in which lay the dancer, and glanced fearfully round. The room was very bare of furniture, and the yellow hangings fell flatly against the walls. No, there was no one here, and the fire, burning brightly in the deep chimney opposite the bed, threw out a friendly warmth. The two carved figures of Faith and Hope looked down upon her and seemed to give her courage,—a feeling of pity, of desire to heal and save, filled her soul. She turned, and, with a

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certain shock of surprise, met Joaquina's narrow-lidded bright eyes fixed on herself; these gleaming eyes were full of eager curiosity, under the bedclothes the meagre body trembled, and yet over the small, red mouth there hovered a strange smile. . . .

And then, quite suddenly, Anne Leycester felt shaken by a passion of repulsion and horror; the atmosphere seemed to have become charged with evil, peopled with demons of cruelty and mocking devilry. It was as if a great hush had come on the place; as if something horrible was about to happen,—something that she, Anne Leycester, would be powerless to prevent. She forgot Paul, and all that Paul signified to the woman who was looking at her with so sinister and meaning a gaze.

The long fur-lined cloak Anne had been wearing slipped off her shoulders, as, almost unconscious of what she was doing, she moved round the bed, and approached nearer to the woman lying in it,—but Joaquina, her face full of restless excitement, held up her hand.

"No, no," she cried, "don't begin yet!" and then, straightening herself and leaning forward, she called out in a loud, clear voice, "She is here, Satellite! You had better do it now,"—and there fell on Anne's ears the high, thin, inarticulate cry of an animal in mortal pain and terror.

Joaquina fell back on her pillows; for the first time since Mrs. Leycester had entered the room, a look of peace came over her face, and the sinister smile which had hovered on her lips gave way to one of placid satisfaction. "You can come out now and go downstairs again," she called out, weakly, "but first you must show it to me! I don't think you are to be trusted where one of those creatures you and Nicolette are so fond of are concerned!"

Anne, turning round, saw a tall, thin, sad-faced man, dressed in evening clothes, fill up for a moment the

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aperture between the larger and the smaller room. Then, slowly moving forward, he came and stood by her side; drops of sweat glistened on his forehead, and in his outstretched left hand there lay something which looked like a small heap of swansdown; Anne gradually realized that it was a dead white mouse.

"Come here!" exclaimed Joaquina, impatiently. "Come close up to my bed, I want to see it! Are you sure it's quite dead?" She put out her tiny bony hand, and touched the still warm little body; then she shivered slightly: "Isn't it odd to think that it was alive, and still running about, a few moments ago?" she said,—then lightly: "Thank you, Satellite. It was really nice of you to do that; I know you hated to do it! You had better go downstairs now, I don't want you any more."

Without an answering word, and without even glancing at Anne Leycester, the man whom Joaquina had called Satellite turned away, and Anne heard the door close behind him.

"Come up nearer to me," said the dancer,—then, "Do you know Oriona? Have you ever been to her?"

"No," said Mrs. Leycester almost inaudibly, "I do not know her—I have never been to her."

"She's wonderful," said Joaquina, now speaking in a low, tired voice. "She's not a palmist, you know, but a crystal-gazer. She doesn't only see what's already happened, as so many of them do; she can really and truly foresee the future. She knows all about you,—she described you exactly before you came to cure my little girl. She told me that the first time you would bring life, and so you did—to Nicolette; and the second time —death."

Her voice sank to a whisper, and a cunning look came over the thin, and now flushed, face: "And so you did bring death—to the Satellite's white mouse! I arranged it all with Oriona yesterday. It was my idea,

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not hers; I said to her 'Does it matter to whom she brings death? Wouldn't an animal do as well as a human being?' and she said 'Yes,' she felt sure it would"; and, as Mrs. Leycester made no word of comment, Joaquina added fretfully, "Well, why don't you begin? I'm quite ready,—Paul said you would pray."

Shuddering nervously, Anne fell on her knees; she knelt clear of the bed, and covered her face with her hands. All the spirits of impurity and cruelty from which she had always kept so far apart, and that in spite of her sympathy with human suffering, seemed now to encompass her; she seemed to hear a voice repeating the words, "Not God, but the devil can help you here," and with terror she felt strength and power pouring into her,—not the strength to save, but power to destroy, and the sensations with which she was familiar as preceding the exercise of her peculiar gift seemed inverted.

Her soul became a battle-ground, the guerdon for which unseen combatants were fiercely fighting; she felt herself swayed now by one side, now by the other, but the darker spirits spoke far more loudly.

"You have been brought here to save Paul Feyghine," whispered the unfamiliar, but oh! how potent voices. "You are the instrument by which is to be shortened this cruel, this lascivious woman's term of life on earth. To what good use could such a one as Joaquina Nuñez turn a few more years, a few more months, even a few more weeks on earth? Her living on,—as your own brother told you but a short while ago,—will do Paul Feyghine irreparable injury."

And then, as if this argument were not enough, Anne was made to look through certain windows of the house of life,—windows hitherto closely shuttered, for she was, if an ardent and passionate, yet a singularly child-hearted woman. She was shown the hell such a woman as Joaquina can and does create in the men about her,

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and that while herself remaining in a tepid limbo of futile, short-lived emotions, of which the only lasting manifestation is keen egoism and intense self-love.

Then this phantasmagorical scene, filled with shadows, among which only one stood out clear and distinct, faded away; and there appeared to Anne, in the still summer sunlight, the graceful figure tricked out as the Knave of Hearts. She gazed into the bright, narrow-lidded eyes which had been such lodestars to Paul Feyghine; she dwelt in thought on the small curved painted lips which had so often trembled beneath Paul's kisses; and her heart grew very cold. She hearkened to the unfamiliar voices and assented to their teaching resolutely, "Yes, I have been chosen,—sent here, not to heal, but to destroy this wicked, mischievous human being! Whatever fear and remorse may be henceforth my portion, I will now do that which will save Paul."

Quite deliberately she allowed herself to become, as she had so often done before when engaged on her work of healing, the hardly conscious instrument of a power outside herself; but the strength which she felt poured into her was strength to destroy and not to save. . . .

The woman lying in the bed became restless. She turned this way and that. "I can't see!" she exclaimed suddenly; then, with a touch of dreadful suspicion, "What are you doing? You are not curing me as you promised—" Her voice rose into a scream of fear, "You are killing me! Help!" she cried, "Paul, where are you? She's killing me—dragging me down into hell!"

Her cry seemed to break a very evil spell; and again Anne heard voices, the spirits of pity and mansuetude came once more into their own. "It is not for you to judge," they said, "still less to destroy. Give her time

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to make what peace is possible to such a one as she has been permitted to be."

Anne Leycester rose from her knees. She came up close to the bed, and grasped Joaquina's hands in hers. "Hush!" she said in a low, collected voice, "Don't you understand that what you did,—what you made that cruel man do,—banished all the good and holy influences which were about us? I can refrain from injuring you, but I cannot do you any good to-night; you have yourself made that impossible."

Then, as she saw the woman's face before her fill once more with shrinking terror, she added slowly, almost reluctantly, "But what I have failed in doing, Holy Church may do for you; I have myself seen a man—my own father—brought back from the gates of death by the administration of the last rites of his and your faith. I have been told that only a few hours ago you were willing to see a priest. Are you still willing? If yes, I will go and fetch him"—and Anne loosened her grasp of the dying woman's hands. She was still shaken by conflicting desires and emotions. With humiliation and distress, she felt herself still possessed with a hidden hope, a secret longing that the dancer would die.

Joaquina clutched her hands. "Don't let me go," she moaned; "I feel better, stronger, since you took hold of my hands. Are you sure that what you say is true? Animals have no souls; how could that little mouse do me any harm—now?"

"Are you willing to see a priest?" repeated Anne dully; "if you are, I will go and fetch him."

"Do you really think he will make me any better?" said Joaquina wistfully, "Paul said not; Paul promised that you would cure me, as you cured Nicolette. It is not that I fear to see a priest," she added quickly "after all, I have not been a bad woman,—I've hardly

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anything to confess. But it's a long, long time since I last went to confession,—a long, long time."

"You have a child," said Anne sternly. "You would not wish your daughter to live such a life as you have led yourself?"

"She has not the dispositions," answered Joaquina sadly; "she has neither the leg nor the foot! I should be very sorry for *my* child to become a bad dancer. But there will be no necessity for her to dance, or to do anything," went on the dancer proudly; "she is already a rich little girl, for Mr. Feyghine has placed some money on her head."

"Is Nicolette Paul Feyghine's child?" asked Anne, and unconsciously her hand closed more tightly over the frail fingers she was once more holding.

"You are hurting me!" cried Joaquina. "You are holding my hand too tightly." Then cunningly she added, "If Mr. Feyghine did not believe the child to be his child, would he have placed money on her head?"

"Then Nicolette is Paul Feyghine's child?" repeated Anne Leycester.

"I do not know," said Joaquina pettishly. "There! Now you have the truth. If you were to give me all the shawls in Seville, I could not tell you more."

* * * * * *

As Anne Leycester came slowly, stumblingly, down the winding stairway of the Tower, she was filled with an awful depression of soul and body. She dreaded the task which now lay before her,—that of telling Paul that she had failed, that of imploring him to permit the poor small-souled human being, round whom was wrapped the whole of his great heart, to enjoy such measure of spiritual succour as was possible.

The ordeal came more quickly than she had thought it would, for a sudden turn brought her on the narrow landing on which opened the door of the octagon room

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where hung the great portrait of Joaquina. As Anne stood on the threshold, she saw that Paul was not alone, and, strangely enough, it was the other occupant of the room who stirred the most pity, aroused the most concern in her mind, for this man—the man she had last seen in the gay trappings of the King of Hearts—seemed to be suffering from the extreme of physical terror.

He was sitting at the table which filled the centre of the large room, and his arms, flung out over the polished surface, supported his pallid, twitching face. So might look a man who, at a turning of his lonely way, suddenly confronts the form of his watchful, ambushed enemy,—an enemy who, he knows, is determined to subject him to frightful torture. For the first time in his life, Hacking was now close to the body of death, and, as he firmly believed, hell-fire; his mother was a Plymouth Sister, and in her grim creed had been spent his childhood and youth.

Feyghine was standing under Joaquina's portrait. His arms were crossed in a posture familiar to him; he seemed unaware of the other man's presence, and yet, when he saw Anne at the door and hastened to join her, he cast a look of aversion and contempt at the crouching figure.

Anne drew her cousin into the shadow; they walked down a few steps in silence. "Well?" he said at last, "Well, Anne?" and she looked down to avoid the strained, agonized questioning in his eyes.

"I failed," she whispered. "But, Paul, she is willing to see a priest. For God's sake, don't deny her what is her right. Be merciful——"

There was a long silence between them. "I shall have to give her up," he said suddenly. "I suppose in this matter the Orthodox and the Roman Churches agree—once she has made her peace with their heaven, they will not allow her to see me again."

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"I don't know," she whispered, "if they would be, in this case, so—so hard."

"Ah, but I do know," he said sharply; "from their point of view I suppose they're right. Still, I agree, Anne. It won't hurt her, poor little soul, not to see me again, as it hurts me. If it did—ah! that would be a very different matter." He drew a deep breath, and straightened himself. "I'll go up to her now," he said. "I'll take back what I said to her before you came,—I'll tell her that the priest may do her good."

As he turned, they heard the heavy hall door below swing slowly to,—there came the sound of feet on the flagged floor, and there followed that which showed that Paul's intention had been anticipated,—that his cousin had already taken steps to save the dancer from dying unfortified, unshriven, unanel'd. For, on the stillness, there floated up to where they stood the slowly-uttered words, spoken in an unknown voice, a voice full of grave authority: "Peace be on this house;" and then, in quick response, Francis Domville's full tones blending with the thinner accents of Benedict Stone: "And on all that dwell therein."

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CHAPTER XXXII

Il y a quelque chose de plus cruel que la jalousie et la trahison, c'est le départ de l'être aimé.

"I'M tired of being here, so now I'll go and find Concepcione."

The tone was determined, unquestioning, and very unchildlike, and yet the tiny little figure, clad in curiously fashioned black from head to foot, had been till the last few moments full of very childish curiosity concerning all the pretty things in Anne Leycester's square drawing-room.

Since her arrival at Sanctuary House an hour ago, Nicolette had shown not a trace of shyness, or of that self-consciousness which now takes the place of shyness in the modern child, and had Mrs. Leycester's heart been less heavy,—had she not now been expecting every moment Paul Feyghine, she could not but have been a little amused, and perhaps a little scandalized, by the behaviour of this new inmate of her house, and, as she hoped, of her heart.

During the last hour Nicolette had babbled incessantly; she seemed to have a large acquaintance, and she called all her acquaintances, if women, by their Christian names, if men, by their surnames. But even in that hour it had become clear to Anne that the little girl's real world was composed of only two people, the old Spanish nurse and Paul Feyghine; of the mother who now lay dead she seemed to have no thought at all.

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Paul had grasped eagerly at Anne's offer to take the child, and though she did not allow herself to repent having done so, she began to be aware that henceforth Nicolette would and must play a very real part in her life. And then, as she looked at the child, she saw something in the resolute little face, in the short upper lip and the curve of the small chin, which filled her with mingled relief and pain: "Now I'll go and find Concepcione,"—so would the infant Letty Domville, now Madame Feyghine, have looked and spoken sixty years ago; so, for the matter of that, would she look and speak now if intent on her own will.

"You must stay here, with me, a little longer, till Mr. Feyghine comes. He is going on a journey, and I am expecting him every moment——" Anne hesitated, and then added sadly, "to say good-bye."

Nicolette made no answer; indeed, her little face became illumined rather with a look of satisfaction than of displeasure; and Anne, pained at her indifference, turned again to the writing-table where she had been trying in vain to fix her mind on the details of her workaday life, while the child, who had resisted any attempt at more conventional forms of amusement, moved about much as does a little dog making acquaintance with a room which instinct tells him is to be his home.

The moments passed slowly. Anne was listening intently for the sound of the cab which was to bring Paul to Sanctuary Square on his way to the station. She had almost forgotten Nicolette, when suddenly at her elbow she heard the determined, unchildlike voice saying, "I want you to do up my gloves."

Anne laid down her pen; she turned in surprise to find that her tiny visitor had put on all the heavy sombre outdoor garments which she, Mrs. Leycester, had taken off the child on her arrival there, an hour ago.

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"But you're not going away!" she exclaimed. "You know what I told you,—and what Concepcione told you," she added quickly, noting the look of obstinacy creeping over the dark little face which looked up at her with reproachful eyes. "You are going to live here now with me, Nicolette, and I will do my best to make you a happy—happy little girl."

"But I'm going away with Paul to-day," observed the child. "If he's going on a journey, then I'm going with him."

"But he is going to Russia,—to the war," said Anne, now much distressed,—distressed on her own behalf as well as on that of Nicolette. "He is going to fight——"

"—But I can fight too," said Nicolette quickly: "I can bite, I can scratch,—any of them will tell you so; even the Satellite, even Hacking. I once bit Hacking when he teased me. But I thought it was wicked to fight; I thought you were"—she clapped her hands together —"whipped, you know!"

And from that position the child would not move. Nay, at one moment she gave evidence of being possessed of a plentiful supply of that which she had called the Satellite and Hacking to witness; tears of anger came into her eyes, and she stamped her foot. Then, with extraordinary self-command, she checked herself; she felt so sure, she knew so well, that Paul would do what she wanted,—that he would take her away with him, away from this sad-faced woman and this strange house.

But when at last the door suddenly opened and Paul Feyghine came into the room, resolved, as even Nicolette could not but see, to cut the parting short; when he put his arms round Anne and the little girl together, and then turned and left them without a word, —even Nicolette was awed into stillness.

Hesitating a moment, Anne with a cry caught up the

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child; she ran along the passage, and so out through the hall, across the courtyard to the iron gate which opened on the solitary square. There she stopped, for it was very cold and a fine sleet was falling, and together the woman and child gazed after the tall figure hurrying away in the twilight.

Feyghine had left his cab in a side street; now, walking quickly across Sanctuary Square, some instinct made him look back; he turned and saw the forlorn group at the gate. His sore heart smote him; he came slowly back,—and once more he put his arms about them both. For the first time in his life he kissed Anne,—kissed her hair, kissed her eyes, and at last rested his lips on her lips. "Go in," he said roughly, "don't stop out here in the cold. I'll come back, Anne, come back to you,—to Nicolette."

And then, after he had waited to see the door close on them, he went.

THE END

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